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BY TEXAS JACK. **NEP WYLDE**, THE BOY SCOUT.



TEXAS JACK.

Ned Wylde, THE BOY SCOUT.

BY TEXAS JACK.—(J. B. Omohundro.)

CHAPTER I.

THE GRAVE IN THE COTTONWOOD.

A boy lay fast asleep beneath the shelter of three cottonwoods. The hour was bordering upon midnight, and he slept soundly, as though worn out with a long tramp—a weary tracking of a faint trail leading toward the Big Horn Mountains.

His garments were worn and travel-stained, and his face and hands browned by exposure.

Suddenly the sleeper awoke with a slight start, as though some grim shadow had flitted through his dreams, or a presentiment of coming evil had clutched at his heart.

Yet still he lay motionless.

Around him was only darkness. All was silence, except the rustling of the leaves stirred by the wind and the gurgling of the little stream, on the bank of which he had pitched his solitary camp.

Presently there came to his waiting ears the sound of troops upon the prairie.

Gathering his rifle and fixings together, he prepared to be ready to meet either friend or foe.

Stealing quietly from his position under the cottonwoods, he sought a sheltered spot in the thicket near by, that studded a neck of lowland, half-surrounded by a bend in the stream.

Then, from beyond the treetops, peered the moon, lighting up the prairie with a flood of silvery beauty, and casting the timberland still more in shadow.

At length three horsemen came swiftly over the prairie crest, and the moonlight, falling full in their faces, showed that they were white.

Nearer they came, and the better look he had of them caused the boy to feel that though they had white faces they had black hearts, and he crouched still lower, and grasped his rifle with steadier nerve.

Pressing forward rapidly, the three men headed almost directly for the spot where the boy lay concealed—two of them riding loose and free, the third carrying a heavy burden across his saddle.

The moonlight sifted right into the faces of the three men, and the boy soon could see their very features.

First, apparently the leader, rode a young man of perhaps twenty-five years of age, of medium size, and dressed in border style, with carbine slung at his back, and knife and revolvers in his belt, while his face was almost hidden beneath a long, heavy beard, yet it seemed haggard, calm and desperate.

Next came a heavily-built man, who looked neither to the right nor left, but rode straight forward with stolid face, evil eyes and set lips.

The third, who was charged with the burden, was tall, gaunt, and his face was concealed, except his gleaming eyes and thin nose, by his long, matted hair and beard.

Constantly his eyes glanced to either side and behind him, with a wild, restless look, but never in front of him, for here they would fall upon the ghastly burden he carried.

The burden he bore and an unpleasant sight to look upon, was a woman—motionless, senseless, a gash across her throat, a wound upon her forehead.

Now and then a single drop of the not yet congealed blood fell upon the prairie, and to this hollow-eyed man it seemed that he could hear it drop, for he would start, glance more nervously around, shake the reins of his horse, and push blindly on in the wake of the others.

Nearer and nearer they came to the timber, until at last they halted, not twenty paces away from the boy.

"Here is the place," said the leading rider, pointing toward the thicket; "wait until I see if any one has sought shelter here for the night."

As he spoke the man threw himself from his horse, and noiselessly glided into the timber, passing within a few feet of the boy, who, in breathless wonder, was crouched down, as silent and motionless as the bleeding form across the saddle.

A short while passed away—the two men uttering no word, the blood still dropping slowly upon the prairie, and the scene as silent as a graveyard at midnight.

Then the man returned, as noiselessly as he had disappeared, and approaching the horseman who bore the ghastly burden, he said, in low, deep tones:

"Give it to me; the coast is clear. Daniel, you bring the spade. We will leave our horses here, for mine will not stray, I know."

Then he took "it" from the tall man, who handed the limp form with averted face and a visible shudder.

A moment after the three strode into the timber, the leader bearing the woman's form.

The boy viewed all this with intense interest. Something terrible had been done! perhaps something as terrible was to follow.

He was burning with curiosity—consuming with a desire to know more—and, if it cost him his life, he determined to attempt a solution of the mystery; so, nerving himself to his task, he glided softly on after the three men.

Soon the hum of voices warned him that those he followed had halted, and creeping forward he beheld a small opening in the timber a space free from undergrowth, and carpeted with a rich growth of grass.

"Here is the spot—just under the ashes of this old camp-fire; now go to work and dig."

It was the leader who spoke, and the three men stood in the opening, the moonlight struggling through leafy branches, and falling lightly upon them.

The tall man seized the shovel, carefully scraped away the ashes and began to dig up the rich, black earth.

In turn the others relieved him, until the grave was ready—a shallow sepulcher, not two feet in depth.

Then the body of the woman was placed in the little trench, and arranged with some care; a few branches and green leaves were spread upon it, and the dirt was shoveled back, and the ashes spread over the top, while the surplus dirt was carried off and thrown into the stream.

"If the ground sinks in, it will be believed to have been hollowed out for a camp-fire," and the leader turned away.

As his two comrades moved away into the shadow, again, he turned back, and with arms folded across his broad breast, stood silently looking down upon the spot, beneath which lay a woman's form.

A moment he stood thus, and then he, too, turned away and disappeared.

A few moments more passed, and the boy heard the tread of hoofs upon the prairie, as the men sped away from the corpse that lay buried in the thicket of Sand Stream Trace.

The boy listened for awhile to the departing hoof-strokes, and then, springing from his lurking-place, began, with quivering, eager hand to dig into the ground that covered the form of the woman.

Here was a mystery, and possibly a crime; he could not rest until he knew more of it, and he clutched out the dirt with trembling fingers—he scraped and tore with nervous fury.

Soon, something cold and clammy touched his fingers; he started, and the sweat dropped like beads from his face.

Then he reached down once more, put forward his hand, and grasped that of the woman.

By one effort he conquered the sudden thrill of repugnance, and raised the head from the loose dirt.

It was cold, hard, clammy.

Then his eyes went down into the grave, and a gleam of light met them—a light that shimmered in the silvery ray that the moon cast down upon the spot.

A motion of the cold hand, and another sparkle of light.

"It is a diamond upon her finger; what can this mean?"

"Surely these men were no robbers. I must see the face," and he bent again to his task, again dragged the earth from the grave.

Suddenly he stopped, and his head was raised, his ears strained to catch some sound.

A second more and he sprung to his feet, for off upon the prairie was heard wild warcries, the clatter of the hoofs of a hundred ponies, the angry crack of rifles; and a wild shout of defiance, that the boy somehow felt certain came from the lips of the young man who had been the leader in the strange burial in the thicket.

The noise and the danger came upon him like a cloud-burst; the dead woman, and the mystery hanging over her, faded away before personal necessities, personal peril, and seizing his rifle, the boy bounded from the half-open grave and rushed headlong from the thicket.

CHAPTER II.

A BOY AT BAY.

THE name of the young man who had been the leader, at the secret burial told of in the foregoing chapter, was Hart Moline—at least, that was the appellation by which, by common consent of those who best knew him, he was oftentimes called.

He had done desperate work on several occasions in the border-towns—was a wild, reckless, free-and-easy fellow, ready on the instant with knife and revolver, and roamed through prairie, camp, settlement and mountain at will; while of his past life, to his appearance on the frontier, several years before, nothing was known, and, as it was, his face was familiar to more men than he cared to know.

When Hart Moline remained for awhile at the grave, his two companions did not wait for his coming, but mounted their horses and dashed away, leaving the steed of their leader still patiently awaiting his rider.

An instant after that Moline came from the thicket out into the bright moonlight, and cast but a cursory glance at his retreating comrades.

He then took from his face the heavy beard, evidently worn as a disguise, leaving his handsome, but reckless, features visible, the stern mouth shaded by a long silken mustache.

Throwing the rein of his steed over his arm, he walked thoughtfully up the incline which led to the bank of the stream.

Reaching the crest of the divide he stood intently gazing over the plain, seeing, yet unconsciously so, the forms of his late followers growing dim with distance.

Then a sigh broke from his stern lips, and folding his arms he turned his eyes upward, gnawed the ends of his mustache viciously, and seemed endeavoring to look beyond the silvery moon and twinkling stars.

Long he stood thus, unmindful of a dark form creeping along the low bottom-land at his back; his thoughts were in the clouds, his eyes upon the stars.

Presently a curse, half-aloud, half-hissed, came from his lips, and he turned with an impatient gesture and swung himself into his saddle.

That movement saved his life, for as he did so a rifle-bullet sung above his head, and a burst of wild yells recalled him to consciousness of the outer world, in a manner decidedly unpleasant.

A wild cry of defiance burst from his lips, and his horse shot away, without waiting for gathering of rein or word of command; the noble animal knew both his duty and his rider.

His duty was to get out of harm's way as speedily as possible, and his rapid gait made him seem to skim over the ground like a bird.

But the moonlight rendered horse and rider a fair target for the Sioux in pursuit, who, with one accord, opened upon the white man with bow and rifle.

As the bullets swept around him and

over him, Hart Moline bent low in his saddle and urged on his horse to a greater speed.

At first he seemed inclined to return the fire with his repeating-rifle; but, what mattered it whether there was a Sioux more or less in the chase? Besides, to bring down any of their number would but make the pursuit more bitter and lasting.

"The red devils are in earnest," he muttered, as he flew along, his keen eyes narrowly watching to see if some of his foes were not heading him off in the dark and gloomy places which lay in black lines across the prairie, at the foot of the divide.

"That girl laid a trap for me, I verily believe, and I walked right into it; I was a fool to trust her.

"Ha! how they come on! but their ponies will soon feel this pace; if not, I shall have to open on them ere I reach yonder line of timber, where I will be safe, if I have to desert poor Swift."

Perhaps Swift heard and understood the soliloquy of his master, for he at once put on an extra spurt of speed and the distance between pursued and pursuers rapidly increased, until Moline felt that he was out of range of arrow and bullet.

His course lay parallel with the divide, and at length he reached the crest and looked backward.

As he did so he saw in the dark shadow of the timber-line, flash after flash succeeding each other in rapid succession, and followed by a confused medley of yells.

Drawing rein, Hart Moline faced to the rear and gazed attentively back toward the thicket.

Not half a mile away he beheld his pursuers who had also come to a halt, their attention diverted from him by the contest going on in their rear.

Seeing their inability to overtake the horseman, they at once set off on the back track, determined to join their brother warriors in the attack at the thicket.

"Some one is at bay yonder. I will also take the back trail," murmured Hart Moline, and he started at an easy gallop toward the thicket.

It held a strange attraction for him, and he wished to see what white man was lingering near the little opening where was hidden the lonely grave.

But it was no white man whose rifle rattled forth death-knells with such marvelous rapidity; but a white boy—Ned Wylde—whom the reader has already met.

When the boy dropped the hand of the buried woman, and sprung away, his first intention was to take to the river-bank and follow closely its course, for, versed in plaincraft, he knew that, for the purpose of concealment, the bluffs upon either side offered the best place of refuge.

Striking deeper into the gloom he heard answering yells upon the river-bank, and well knew that escape in that direction was effectually barred, so he turned quickly and hastened along up-stream, following in a line parallel to that taken by Hart Moline.

He ran lightly and fast, and was making good progress, when he discovered in front of him, and blocking his way, an Indian camp.

At the same time he heard sounds from the other side of the river, and from the timber through which he had just passed, which now seemed alive with red-skins, pressing on in the direction of the spot where he stood.

In a few moments they would sweep him up in their circle and his life would go out, if he did not quickly make some supreme effort to escape.

Like a deer he suddenly bounded away to the right, pushing hard for the edge of the woods, for it seemed to him that he might make his way through the long grass of the bottom-land, and regain the open prairie.

But the pursuers in the timber pressed the boy more closely, and sounds of alarm were heard in the village, while the savage bay of hounds added to the desperation of his situation.

Then the boy grew reckless, and he leaped from the timber to risk his chances upon the open plain.

But this proved to be a perilous movement, at an inauspicious moment, for a long line of horsemen was wending its way along, not far from the spot where he broke cover, and quick eyes at once caught sight of him; the line quivered, and half a hundred braves wheeled their ponies and charged down upon him, and Ned Wylde was in deadly danger.

"We'll die game right here," the boy said to himself, with cool determination and ready firmness, far beyond what might be expected from one of his years.

Glancing around him he beheld a slight hollow in the prairie, and springing into it, he dropped on one knee and commenced his murderous fire, for, armed with the Evans repeating rifle, carrying thirty-four shots, he felt his ability to surprise, if not sicken the Indians in their attack upon him.

One, two, three! and the right end of the approaching line dropped off with magical quickness.

Four, five, six! and the sharp, wicked reports almost blended, while the center of the advancing line staggered badly.

Seven! and a pony and brave went down.

But now a wild yell broke from the red-skins—they were accustomed to the seven-shot Spencer rifle, and they felt their foe at their mercy—his rifle was empty, they thought, and with demoniacal cries of cruel joy, they came on.

But not the iron tube of destruction was not lowered from the boy's shoulder and yet there followed eight, nine, ten! in rapid succession.

Ay, and like a rattling volley the savage cracks followed, and with deadly effect to Indian pony and red-skin rider, until, surprised, shattered, bleeding, and with dying and dead left on their trail, the live halted, quivered, surged backward, and left the boy—proud, excited, defiant, and flushed with victory.

But at this moment a mounted Sioux dashed up behind the youth, leaped lightly to the ground, and threw himself upon the surprised boy.

But the boy was born with a natural gift for a hand-to-hand fight—was wiry as a leopard, slippery as an eel, and the Sioux, who thought the trouble was over, was terribly mistaken, for the butt of the rifle struck him fairly upon the jaw, and then followed a dull, ominous crushing—the grip of the red-skin loosened, and he fell backward to the ground.

But the boy did not tarry now, for, without a pause, he leaped over the red-skin, and seized the rein of the hardy-looking little brown pony that stood motionless at the spot where his master had left him.

With an agile spring, he flung himself upon the back of the pony, and with a defiant yell, urged him away at full speed, followed by a score of yelling Sioux.

CHAPTER III.

A DISCOVERY AND SURPRISE.

As the noise of pursuit rolled away up the river, a horseman came cautiously down through a buffalo water-trail that broke the low bluff on the opposite side of the stream. His eyes were restlessly glancing around him, his ears strained to catch the sounds of the chase after the boy, and which were waxing fainter in the distance.

Halting in the buffalo-trail, he seemed endeavoring to pierce with his keen eyes the gloomy shadows that lay before him on the other shore, and as the moonlight fell upon him, it displayed a man of fine physique and fearless face, dressed in buckskin, and thoroughly armed.

A single glance at rider and horse was sufficient to show a well-mounted, well-armed border scout—one who was venturing into the very den of his red foes.

"Duty demands it, and I must not shrink," he muttered, and after allowing his steed to refresh himself with a draught of water, he pushed resolutely into the stream, and struck out for the other shore.

Arriving upon the other bank, he marked out his course without hesitation, as though acquainted with the surroundings, and cautiously pressed on into the thicket at the very point where Hart Moline and his companions had entered.

With cautious pace he rode on, until his practiced eye soon fell upon a recent trail across the small opening in the glade.

Dismounting quickly, he narrowly scanned the ground, and following, like a hound on the scent, he the next instant came upon a sight which caused him to quiver with a thrill of astonishment.

From the dark ground a little eye of fire seemed looking up at him, and stooping over, he beheld, protruding from the ground, a bare arm, the fingers of the hand working convulsively.

Recovering quickly from the shock produced by the terrible discovery, the scout knelt at the side of the grave, and with hasty, nervous hands, proceeded to tear away the earth from above the form of an evidently living woman.

Realizing the terrible danger that both were in, he worked with fierce haste; he pulled, he tore, he tugged, and at length the buried form lay before him.

The next instant he raised the woman in his strong arms, and bore her swiftly to where he had left his horse.

A moment more he was mounted and making his way cautiously back over the route he had come, unmindful now of the orders that had sent him scouting about the Sioux camp.

As he forded the river, he stooped over and dashed water into the face of the woman he held upon his arm.

Whether she would come back to consciousness was a question he could not answer until he gave a closer examination into her condition; but certain it was that his duty to do all for her in his power was plain, and he was anxious to get at a safe distance from the dangerous neighborhood in which he then was.

Following the line of river for some distance, he at length branched off toward a range of hills not far away, and a ride of a few moments brought him to a narrow canyon, through which flowed the rivulet of a spring further up.

Seeking a secluded spot, he dismounted with his burden, and laying the slender, graceful form upon a grassy knoll, for the first time narrowly scanned the face of the woman whom, by such a strange chance, he had torn, yet alive, from the grave in the thicket.

The moonlight fell upon the upturned pallid face, and with a startled cry the man sprung back, exclaiming:

"Good God! Marian May! You here?"

Turning half away the scout seemed undecided, and at the same time his strong frame quivered with emotion.

Perhaps it was the sound of a voice once heard before, or the effects of the cool water upon her face; but there swept a terror through the form, the eyes half-opened, the lips parted, and again the woman seemed unconscious.

With stern, heavy tread the scout paced to and fro, his brow dark, his eyes glowing, and his teeth set firm.

Whether she lived or died, seemed now, by his strange manner, a matter of little moment.

The ghastly object, that but a few moments before had swerved him from the line of his duty, now lay uncared for before his eyes.

At length the scout turned once more toward the motionless form; one way or the other, he had made up his mind as to the course he would pursue.

Approaching the woman with a firm step and hard face, he set about examining her wounds with real surgical skill.

There was a cruel gash on the shapely throat, a bruise or two on the forehead: what the result might be seemed doubtful.

With rest, perfect quiet and a strong consti-

tution, it might be life; as things were, the chances seemed more favorable for death.

In a few moments the wounds were gently bathed and bandaged; and then the full lips were moistened from time to time with a few drops of brandy from the scout's canteen.

Then he sat down to wait—it was all that he could do.

The pendulum of life at length came swinging back, with a gradually increasing strength of stroke; the white lips began to show color, the eyelids to quiver, the breath to come and go with a soft, regular movement.

Holding his fingers upon the delicate wrist, the scout sat like a statue in the moonlight, watching and waiting, while his brave, handsome face seemed cold as marble, and grim specters of past memories trooped before him; the face he gazed upon recalled an embittered bygone—it reopened a wound in his heart he had hoped was forever healed.

Suddenly a shadow fell upon him, and glancing quickly up the scout half-sprung to his feet; but a cry of warning caused him to remain motionless, his eyes riveted upon a form not ten feet distant.

That form was a young Indian girl of wondrous beauty.

Yet her attitude was hostile, for in her hands she held a bow, drawn back with the full strength of her arm—fitted for deadly work, was a long, keen arrow, and it covered the heart of the scout: a second more, a quiver of muscle, and it might pierce his heart in search of life.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROSE OF THE ROSEBUD.

SOME three leagues away from the scenes presented in the foregoing chapters, a well-timbered gorge led up into the mountains, its sides broken here and there by huge masses of rocks that rose in jutting peaks, forming a wild and picturesque expanse of scenery—a fitting home for the red children of the forests, whose natures were scarcely less wild than their surroundings.

Near the mouth of this canon, almost concealed by the shadows of the tree under which she stood, a girl, clad in Indian costume, was as motionless as a statue, evidently awaiting the coming of some expected person.

For perhaps an hour she had remained there, in that mute, thoughtful attitude, solitary and alone.

The sound of a light footfall broke at length upon her listening ears, and she turned with eager expectancy, to behold emerge from the gloom a tall, jaunty-looking warrior, who the next instant stood by her side.

That this was not the person expected could be seen at a glance, for the young girl started, a frown swept over her face, and she stepped quickly backward, as though about to fly; but a moment after she halted and stood firm, a bold, beautiful woman, with defiant manner and flashing eyes.

"The Rose of the Rosebud is alone on the mountain; does she wait for the Long Bow, or shall the Biting Wolf cheer her breast?" and the warrior spoke in a low, not unmusical voice.

"The Rose of the Rosebud cares not to see the Long Bow or the Biting Wolf; both are brave warriors; but her heart beats slow in their presence.

"She came from her tepee to be alone, for her soul is sad with dreams of blood; the birds trill sadly in the forests, and the moon and the sun but light up the war-path through mountain and prairie."

"The Rose is not here to meet the Long Bow, then?" resumed the warrior, as if determined upon a certain object.

"Biting Wolf, my tongue is not crooked," replied the maiden, with spirit.

"The Biting Wolf would speak to the Rose of the Rosebud; he has many things to whisper under his blanket."

"The Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse are on

the war-path, and the Black Moon has already reddened his scalping-knife with the blood of the pale-faces; soon, all the young braves are to join them, and ere the Biting Wolf would go, he tells to the Rose his love; he would place her in his tepee to gladden his heart when he comes back from the red trail."

"Yes, the trail will be red—the wail of the women will mingle with the howl of the wolf over the dead.

"The Sioux will take many scalps, but the end of the trail will lead our nation to death; the Sioux graves will dot every hillside and prairie."

"Bah! the Rose of the Rosebud talks like a papoose; she forgets that the pale-faces have robbed us of our hunting-grounds, have trampled upon the graves of our fathers; she forgets that we shiver and starve, and that we must seek the red blood from the pale-face heart."

"The Biting Wolf forgets that the pale-faces are like the leaves on the trees. Let his voice be for peace, for he is a great warrior and should know that the Sioux must fly before our foes like the buffalo before the prairie-fire."

Biting Wolf listened in patience, thinking more of the rippling sweetness of the maiden's voice, than of what she said.

After a pause of a moment the Rose of the Rosebud again asked her companion to leave her alone, and with a look of regret he turned away, and she was again by herself; but no longer did she stand like a statue, gazing out upon the plain, lying white and open in the moonlight, for she seemed impatient, turned restlessly about, and now and then stamped her tiny, moccasin foot with an angry gesture.

Suddenly she started visibly; for a tall form, without a moment's warning, stood by her side.

It was a huge, brawny warrior, in all his war-paint and feathers—his face stern, his arms folded across his red breast.

"The Rose of the Rosebud leaves her tepee to walk in the moonlight with the Biting Wolf," he said, in a low, savage tone.

"The Rose came alone, to be alone; the Biting Wolf met her, and when she told him to leave her he walked away; will the Long Bow do as much?"

"The Long Bow is a great brave; he is ready to go upon the war-path with the Sitting Bull when the moon is gone; but, before he goes, he would ask the Rose to be his bride; he would rather have her in his tepee than many pale-face scalps on his lodge-pole.

"The Biting Wolf is a coward; he would not kill a sick buffalo; but the Long Bow is a great warrior."

"The Rose of the Rosebud will live alone; will the Long Bow leave her now?"

"The Rose smiles on the heart of the Biting Wolf."

"No, she has no heart for the Biting Wolf—she has less for the Long Bow."

"The blood of the pale-faces runs in the veins of the Rose, for her heart is double, her tongue is crooked; but she shall never enter the tepee of the Biting Wolf—she shall die first," and the warrior hissed forth his words with a venom of jealous rage that startled the maiden, and she turned, as if about to fly.

But he seized her arm, and drew from his belt his tomahawk.

There was danger in the savage; his jealous love had driven him mad for the moment.

But the Rose did not tremble under the peril, but looked with scorn into the warrior's face, while she lifted her disengaged hand with a warning gesture.

"The daughter of the Medicine Queen has no fear of Long Bow; he is a coward to threaten a woman; let him remember that the Rose of the Rosebud once saved the life of the Crazy Horse: if harm befalls the Rose he will

* It is a custom for young Sioux braves in wooing a maiden to throw a blanket over her head as well as his own, and beneath its shelter to tell his love. —AUTHOR.

not forget, but hunt the Long Bow to his grave."

"The Long Bow knows no fear; the Rose of the Rosebud does not love him—she must die."

With a strong, quick motion he drew her toward him, and the tomahawk whirled in the air, while a shriek burst from the maiden's lips.

But the tomahawk did not descend, for the cry of Rose was answered by a dozen fierce yells, and as many painted warriors sprung into the open space.

But the Long Bow was not to be thwarted, for, with an answering yell, he seized the maiden in his powerful arms, and bounded away with the speed of a deer.

The form of Long Bow was herculean, his strength gigantic, his speed of foot wonderful, so that, burdened as he was, he kept ahead of the braves in hot pursuit.

But gradually his pace, and the weight he bore, began to tell upon even his giant frame, and slowly his pursuers drew nearer, until at length, like a wolf caught in a trap, he turned at bay upon the very brink of a high precipice.

In the wondrously bright moonlight he stood revealed, holding the maiden with both arms high above his head, with the evident intention of hurling her down to death from the dizzy height.

With wild yells the warriors rushed forward in a vain effort to save her. The savage nature was maddened, and the huge chief swung the graceful form of the maiden out into fearful space, while a shriek of despair burst from her pallid lips.

CHAPTER V.

OLD SOLITARY ON HIS MUSCLE.

IN the shadow of the gorge, overhung by the precipice upon which stood the huge chief, Long Bow, and his intended victim, were encamped two soldiers and a Crow Indian—scouts from the command of General Crook, whose force was not many leagues distant.

Well aware of their close vicinity to an Indian encampment, the three men were concealed in the brush at the base of the opposite side of the gorge, waiting for something to turn up in the way of news, with which they might return to their commander.

Worn out with fatigue, the two soldiers slept, while the untiring Crow kept watch.

Suddenly a burst of wild yells put the three on the alert, and a few moments after there came before their vision the tall form of Long Bow, carrying in his arms a human form.

Startled by the sudden apparition, they looked upward in doubt as to the purpose of the Sioux, who stood plainly relieved against the moonlit sky; but when they saw him, with a wave of his powerful arm, swing the human freight he bore above his head, one of the soldiers threw his rifle to his shoulder and fired with the rapidity of thought, for he saw that it was a woman in the power of the savage warrior.

The ball fell below its mark, even as did a shot fired the next second by the Crow Indian.

Then, just as the Rose of the Rosebud swung off into space, they saw her flight in mid-air suddenly checked by some mysterious cause, and with surprise almost amounting to superstitious terror, they beheld her swing backward, and disappear in the shadow of the trees that grew near the brink of the precipice.

But they could not see the baffled, wondering look upon the face of Long Bow, who stood, almost stupefied with amazement, staring around to solve the inexplicable mystery.

It was only for an instant that the thwarted warrior stood in doubt that was allied to terror.

Recovering his self-possession, he turned and dashed back into the gloom of the timber, determined to discover, if possible, the manner of the strange rescue.

He did not count upon the fact that his pursuers were now almost upon him, until an arrow came whirring over his head.

Then he saw their numbers and knew that the moment for a desperate conflict had come.

For a second he seemed as if about to face the band of braves, and meet them single-handed; but another thought caused him to bound away in rapid flight, for he felt that nothing was to be gained by a fight on the cliff—everything was to be lost.

The approaching Sioux found the Rose at the foot of a huge tree, whose branches jutted boldly out toward the cliff.

She seemed somewhat bruised, and more shaken, but she was not seriously hurt.

The method of her escape was a mystery to them, and the girl did not attempt to explain it.

Among the Sioux was Biting Wolf, and he ordered his braves in pursuit of the flying Long Bow, while he remained to aid the frightened girl back to her tepee in the village, a league away.

As the chief and the maiden left the cliff, and the scene was once more in the calm quietude of night, a dark form came stealing cautiously down from amid the branches of the large tree, at the foot of which the Sioux had found the Rose of the Rosebud.

As he struck the ground he gave a low chuckle of satisfaction, and began to deliberately coil a horse-hair lasso.

Having looped it to his satisfaction, he fastened the coil into his belt and muttered forth:

"That's it, fust, last an' all ther time. Old Solitary ar' allers thar—he ar' a rip-roarin' ole catamount, he ar', an' a tough big hoss on wheels.

"C'u'd 'a' tuk in ther red-skin cuss slick as er whistle, ef it hadn't a-bin fur the rackit.

"Didn't know, altogether, ef it'd make me poppler with them reds; ef they'd heerd my rifle a-speakin' hereabouts, they'd 'a' nosed me out, shure-pop.

"But I throwed ther lariat purty, you bet! How ther gal looked when she comed swingin' back frum purgatory, for she'd 'a' gone thar, artin, ef I'd not noosed her slick—an' Lord luv us all, and ther devil take the hindmost, but ther red *did* look! He's skeered to death, you bet!

"But them reds ain't so smart as they mout be, fur they didn't nose out *who* did that shootin'—p'raps they didn't hear it, kase it was down yender in the gorge.

"Wall, I heerd it, an' I see'd the glitter o' brass buttons, or I'm a liar; they's as durned a set of fools as I is, to cum this near to an Ingin camp.

"But this ain't a-gwine to do—no, no, nary time; so, Old Solitary, you jist git up an' skoot."

It was certainly high time for the scout, for such his appearance proved him to be, to either re-ascend the tree or leave the spot, for the Sioux were returning from the pursuit of Long Bow—nay, they were already near at hand.

The man gave a searching glance around him, and flitted away into the thick darkness of the timber on the mountain-side.

As he glided, rather than walked, along, he muttered to himself:

"It's jist ther same, white-skin, nigger, or red, whariver yer find 'em, ther 'pears to be a woman 'mongst 'em, a-shakin' up the durndest kind of a row, an' ther wust of it ar', Ole Solitary ar' jist as bad as enny on 'em.

"Great grizzlies! my heart 'peared to be a-tryin' to git out o' my skin, when I see that red riz that purty gal up to throw her overboard; you bet I couldn't stand it, to see the peert-lookin' squaw-gal go under, an' so I jist f'ined in ther row, an' ef I'd 'a' got my ha'r riz, I'd only myself to blame.

"Ef't had bin my pard, now, he'd 'a' let her went, you bet, and p'raps I'd better done the same, for, ef that gal blabs, an' ther durned red-skins strike my trail, why I jist git my ha'r out an' no charge; 'twill be done for love, you bet.

"But she seemed like a 'mazin' nice gal fur a woman, she did, fur weemen folks are the devil an' no mistake, kase don't they raise all ther rows that is riz?

"Yet the gal 'beyed me nice, you bet, when

I whispered down to unlet go my lasso-rope from 'round her waist, an' thet I was her best friend.

"She did as I axed her, an' no questions axed nuther; but then she moutened b'lieved me, an' mout blab yit; thar 's nothin' whole-souled in a Sioux Ingin no.

"Wall, I'll not strike th' heart o' them durned fools who fired the shots at our Ingin. I'll jist look up my pard, an' thet we'll see what they is doin' heur so far from home. Ther's more trouble a-brewin', you bet, an' I'll jist look up my pard."

The scout crept cautiously on in the darkness, with a skill and noiselessness that proved him a master of woodcraft.

When he had traveled a mile up the crest of the ravine, he came to where the trees were quite thin, and grew close to the brink of a perpendicular chasm.

As he sped along, he felt conscious that he was nearing the scene of a deadly conflict, for there came to his ears the sound of combat.

"Pard's struck ile, you bet," he whispered, and then dashed forward, revolver and knife in hand.

Before him, upon the brink of the canyon's wall, three men were knit together in a battle for life.

At a glance he saw that one was the man he had referred to as his "pard," and the same glance proved to him that the other two were Sioux—and it seemed to him that one of them was the identical Indian from whom he had rescued the Rose of the Rosebud.

Who the other was he had no time to guess—perhaps one of the pursuers of Long Bow, who had joined forces in an attack upon the white-man, upon whom they had accidentally stumbled.

Long Bow and the pale-face were firmly clenched together, and their movements were so quick and vigorous that the second Sioux had no opportunity to use his knife, while he clung to the white man.

So engrossed were all three in their deadly work that they failed to notice the approach of the man who called himself Old Solitary.

But, as they struggled on the very brink of the precipice, they were quickly made aware of his existence, for he sprung forward and seized the foot of the white man with an iron grasp of his left hand, while he raised his revolver in his right and fired full in the face of one of the Sioux.

Instantly, with a death-cry, the Indian threw himself backward, clutching harder in his agony the enemy he held, and over the fatal brink went the three.

Then came a sudden wrench, as the scout's grasp upon his comrade's foot was felt; but the hold was not sufficient, yet it had its effect, for the red-skin who had received the shot was jerked loose from his grasp upon the white man, and clutching again in blind death-agony seized hold of the other Sioux, and together the three went down, leaving the scout flat on his back, his companion's moccasin in his clenched hand.

CHAPTER VI.

MAKING TRACKS.

WE will now return to Ned Wyldo, the daring boy who so skillfully rescued himself from deadly danger by springing upon the little brown mustang and dashing across the prairie.

He had not ridden far before, to his joy, he discovered that his steed was as fleet as the wind, and was distancing his pursuers.

Still urging on his pony, he felt that he was safe, and with almost boyish glee burst out in a triumphant laugh.

But it was suddenly checked, as he beheld a horseman appear over the roll of the prairie, not two hundred yards away.

Instantly he drew rein, and his rifle swung round ready for use.

The horseman had also halted; but as it satisfied that they were not enemies, they again rode forward, for at a glance each had discovered that the other was not a Sioux.

Nearer and nearer they drew toward each other, when, suddenly, a wild yell burst from the boy's lips, and dashing forward he almost shrieked:

"Aha! Hart Moline, I have found you at last!"

Cruelly the bit was wrenched in the teeth of the steed ridden by the man; like a pivot the animal was wheeled around, face to the rear, and deep sunk the spurs into the flanks.

Away bounded the startled steed, and a bitter curse escaped the lips of the rider.

"Halt! Hart Moline; for God's sake, halt, and tell me what I would know," cried Ned Wyldo, lashing his pony as the man fled from him.

"Oh, God! he is leaving me," again cried the boy, and as the fleet animal still sped away from the pony he continued:

"If I kill him, I can never know. But I will bring down his horse," and the rifle was quickly leveled, then followed a flash—yet still the flying steed fled on.

"I will halt and fire—then I will be certain," cried the boy, and he was drawing rein, when the steed in his front was suddenly drawn back on his haunches, the rider turned quickly in his saddle, the carbine-butt touched the shoulder, the eye ran along the barrel, and with the flash and report the brown pony dropped dead, hurling the boy over his head.

The boy fell hard, and was momentarily stunned, so that he did not hear the loud, mocking laugh that came back to him from the man he pursued.

At length he staggered to his feet and his burning eyes beheld, far off upon the prairie, the steed of Hart Moline still flying away.

Near him lay the dead brown pony, and not a mile away came the Sioux band in hot pursuit; the firing of Hart Moline's rifle had urged them to greater haste.

"Curses on him! he has gone, and I am again almost at the mercy of the red-skins; but I will not say die yet," and away he bounded at full speed, running along in a crouching position, so as not to catch the eyes of his pursuers.

After a run of a quarter of a mile he came to a small ravine, and into this he sprung with alacrity, for the Sioux were still pressing on, with no diminished speed.

Just as he sought the cover of the gulch, the Indians uttered a wild yell; they had come upon the brown pony.

Then they scattered far and wide, and began to beat up their game, for they felt that he could not be far away.

Once or twice a grim warrior rode within a few yards of the boy, but as keen as was his eye, he failed to detect the crouching figure, though he leaped his steed over the ravine.

Perhaps he recalled the deadly aim and wonderful rifle, and did not care to alone meet his formidable foe.

Then he rode away, and Ned Wyldo breathed more easily.

But only for an instant, as another fiercely-painted savage came up, and peered closely upon the boy, and upon either side of him.

Nearer and nearer they came, and discovering the ravine, they sprang from their ponies, and with the lariat over their arms, jumped down into the shallow gulch.

As he did so, a little form arose before him, a grasp of savage tenacity was upon his throat, and a keen knife glittered in the moonlight.

Then followed the crushing, tearing sound of steel going into flesh and bone, and the knife of the boy was driven to the hilt in the brawny heart of the Sioux.

With a gurgling sound in his throat, a smothered groan from his lips, the Indian sunk down at the boy's feet—a dead man.

Glancing his eyes searchingly over the prairie, Ned Wyldo saw that the spot where he now was, was completely surrounded by Indians, and a bright thought flashed through his busy brain.

In the twinkling of an eye he disrobed the Sioux warrior of his scanty attire, and feeling

in the pouch worn at the belt of the savage drew out a quantity of paint, with which he quickly besmeared himself.

Then he dressed himself up *a la Sioux*, and laughed lightly as he thought what a gay brave he made.

The body of the warrior was then huddled down into the lowest part of the gulch, the lariat removed from his wrist, and, a moment after, the boy was astride the Indian's pony, that had been so unexpectedly furnished him.

For a while Ned Wylde thought that the pony was going to give him trouble, as he did not seem to like the change of masters; but he soon quieted him down and began to move out over the prairie.

With head bent down as though closely on the search, the disguised boy roamed hither and thither, gradually edging toward the outer circle of warriors, and when addressed by any near at hand, replying in a disagreeable kind of grunt.

It was a trying ordeal for the boy to pass through; but he stood it bravely, and chuckled to himself, as he found that he had the open prairie before him.

Just at that moment a wild yell was heard, in the direction of the ravine, followed the next moment by a score of voices joining in wild and angry confusion.

"They've found the dead Sioux—now to make tracks," muttered the boy, and as all the warriors rushed toward a common center, doubtless believing the boy had been captured, that fearless youth skimmed away over the prairie, as fast as the nimble legs of his little pony could carry him.

Before him was a hope for life—behind him was certain death.

CHAPTER VII

FOLLOWING WHERE THE ROSEBUD LEADS.

It was a strange, thrilling scene, there in that moonlit gorge of the hills, and for an instant the three, the scout, the Indian girl, and the unconscious woman, seemed like a group of statuary.

It would have made a startling tableau, with its background of overhanging trees, and steep mountain-side.

Upon the scout's face was a look of surprise, of doubt, and his hand rested upon his revolver. Had the one before him, she who stood in such a threatening manner, been a foe worthy of his steel, he never would have hesitated an instant, but made his revolver speak, while he took his chances with the arrow.

But could he fire on a woman, even though she was a red-skin?

No; there lay one woman at his feet, who had already been foully dealt with; he would not commit crime, even in defense of his life.

Upon the face of the Indian girl hovered an expression of anger. She believed the woman at the scout's feet had been slain by the white man, and she almost let go the arrow-head from between her shapely thumb and forefinger.

As still as death lay the woman on the grassy mound.

And thus the three remained for full a minute.

Presently the scout spoke; the suspense and silence were irksome to him, and he addressed the Indian girl in the Sioux tongue.

"What would the red flower of the mountain? Would she also raise the hatchet against the pale-face?"

"The Rose of the Rosebud is no warrior; the sight of blood dims her eyes; but she would send her arrow to the heart of the pale-face, if she knew that he had turned his hand upon a woman."

The girl spoke in pure English, and in a determined tone, which caused the scout to feel that she would keep her word.

After an instant, he said:

"The Rose of the Rosebud would do well; none but a coward would strike a woman; but lower your arrow and aid me here, for sadly does this poor girl need aid—more than I can render her."

"I am a scout of the pale-faces, and I am on the trail of the warriors of your tribe. Near the village of your people on the prairie I found this woman, wounded and insensible, and I brought her here."

"It has been said that the Rose of the Rosebud was beautiful and held a good heart; she is before my eyes and I see that their tongues are not crooked who thus speak of her; let her also show me that she has a good heart, by caring for this poor girl—then she can set her warriors on my trail and I will meet them."

Instantly the arrow and bow were cast down, and the maiden stepped forward timidly, while she said, softly:

"The Rose of the Rosebud loves the pale-faces, and her heart yet trembles from a great danger from which a white brave saved her—"

"What! when were any of my people here?"

"When the moon was yonder on the tree-tops, a wicked warrior sought the love of the Rose, but she had no heart for him, and in revenge he would have thrown her from the cliff; but a pale-face scout threw his lasso about her and saved her life."

"The braves of my tribe came up, and pursued the Long Bow, but I did not tell them that in the tree above their heads was a pale-face enemy, but let them go on the trail of the warrior with a bad heart."

"Why, the moon was on the tree-tops not an hour ago—can there be another scout than myself this near the Indian village?" said the man, glancing at the distance the moon had traveled from the line of forests to which the maiden had pointed, and speaking more to himself than to her.

"Yes; the Rose of the Rosebud saw not his face; but the heart told her he was a pale-face."

"When the Biting Wolf took her to the village of her people, she left him, and she was now going back to the cliff to see if she could find the brave pale-face and thank him."

"Where was the cliff on which you left him?"

The maiden pointed to the eastward, and said:

"Under the shadow of the mountain yonder."

"And your village is in this direction—why is the Rose of the Rosebud so far off the trail?"

The Rose would not be seen by the keen eyes of the Sioux braves; was she not going to meet an enemy to her race?

"True; the tongue of the Rose is straight—I will not doubt her; will she prove her love for the pale-faces and aid this poor girl?"

"The Rose of the Rosebud will care for the pale-face maiden as she would for her own papoose; let the brave scout follow, and he shall see that the Rose speaks with a straight tongue."

Raising the still insensible form lightly in his strong arms, the scout followed the maiden up the gorge, leaving his faithful steed to await his coming.

A walk of half a mile brought them to a wild and picturesque scene—the end of the canon overhung by lofty precipices, over which dashed a wild torrent of water, falling in wavy masses to the bed of the gulch below.

As though familiar with every inch of the way, the Indian girl led the scout through the dashing spray, in behind the waterfall, and darkness fell upon them.

"Where is the Rose? I cannot see," said the scout, hesitating.

No reply came to his question, and again he repeated it.

Still no answer.

"The roar of the cataract drowns my voice. I will call her: Rose, where is the Rose?" and the deep voice of the scout rung above the noise of the falling waters.

Still no answer came, and around him all was dark as death.

But, suddenly, he beheld a glimmer of light; it came nearer, and the next moment the Rose of the Rosebud stood before him, a pine torch in hand.

With a motion of her head she bade the scout to follow, and by the light of the burning fagot he saw that he was in a dense cavern.

Without hesitation he walked on with his precious burden, and soon came to where a glimmer of moonlight was visible.

The next instant he stood in an open space, the moonlight falling full upon him.

Above him upon every side towered lofty precipices, fringed with mountain pine, and he saw that he was in a bowl, or well, shut in upon every side—with perhaps the trail through the cavern the only entrance.

Upon a large tepee, made of dressed skins, upon which were sketched rude figures of various kinds, the moonlight fell, and before the raised entrance curtain sat an old, white-haired woman, of a darkly-bronzed skin.

Upon her hair the light fell, making it look like threads of silver, and her thin arms and ankles were encircled by numerous rings or bands of gold and silver, while her attire was scanty, but of the finest-dressed buckskin, heavily beaded and ornamented.

At a glance he knew her, though he had never met her before; she was the famous Medicine Queen of the Sioux.

"Here let the scout leave the pale-face maiden. In the tepee of the Medicine Queen she is safe," said the Rose of the Rosebud, quietly.

The man laid the graceful form upon a bed of skins, and turned away, after one long glance into the lovely face, a glance that caused a shudder to pass over him, and his stern lips to quiver.

"Now let the pale-face scout go far from here, for the braves of my people will strike his trail with the morning sun," said the maiden, quietly.

"I will go, but ere one moon I will return—perhaps sooner, for I would know if—if Mari—if the woman lives."

"The Rose of the Rosebud is as good of heart as she is beautiful; farewell."

The maiden waved her hand; and the man turned away, the burning eyes of the Medicine Queen fixed upon him, but her lips sternly silent.

A moment more and he was gone, retracing his steps by the same way he had come.

Without difficulty he found his horse, and mounting, slowly rode from the gulch.

As he reached the lower end a rifle-shot broke on his ear, and the next instant three horsemen dashed by.

Two were whites, dressed in uniform—the third was a Crow Indian.

They were riding at hot speed, and behind them came thundering hoofs—half a hundred Sioux were in full pursuit.

The scout was no man to pause when duty demanded action, and wheeling into a ravine, he opened a hot and telling fire upon the coming Sioux, with his matchless Evans rifle, and in a confused mass down went horse and rider in the Indian advance.

CHAPTER VIII

SAVING THE WRONG MAN.

He who had called himself Old Solitary, and his partner, or border chum, known as Montana Mike, were men who had long been on the plains.

The former seemed to have been born in buck-skin, with rifle and knife in hand, and a natural antipathy to red-skins.

He was a man of perhaps fifty, came from none knew where, and in peace-times on the border passed his days in trapping, in season, and in hunting.

When pelts were prime he was happy; out of trapping season he was indifferent.

Several years before he had been severely wounded, in a skirmish with the Sioux, but, determined that they should not have his scalp, he clung to life and crept away, as he believed to die.

And wounded and suffering, at bay in a mountain gorge, wan and desperate, Montana Mike found him one day.

From that day the two became fast friends, for Montana Mike had nursed his wounded comrade back to life.

As for Mike Massey, or as he was oftener called Montana Mike, he was a stern man of forty years of age.

He possessed a splendid physique, was as brave as a lion, a perfect plainsman, and had been bereft of home, wife and children by one fell blow dealt by the Sioux.

Then he took to a trapper's life, and, alone and sorrowful, he passed his days far from settlement and town.

Though wholly unlike Old Solitary, he yet formed a great attachment for him, and the two trapped together, until the gold-fever became contagious in these parts, and the two cached their traps to hunt for the precious metal.

But they soon found that while they were hunting for gold the red-skins were hunting for them, and, after some time spent in the mountains, they learned from a Crow Indian, a scout, that an army of whites were marching in search of Sitting Bull and his band.

Well aware of the haunts of the Indians, and convinced that gold-hunting was not their forte just then, the two determined to scout around, gain all the information they could and then seek General Crook's command, when they would volunteer their services.

In this move they were urged by their intense hatred for the Sioux, for they both had a debt of life to pay—especially Montana Mike, whose wife and children were yet unavenged.

It was while on a scout near the mountain camp of the Sioux that Old Solitary was instrumental in saving the life of the Rose of the Rosebud, and upon his return to the lay-out where his comrade was awaiting him that he so unexpectedly came upon the desperate struggle on the brink of the cliff.

In his flight, after being thwarted in hurling the Rose of the Rosebud from the cliff, it was by accident that Long Bow dashed into the solitary camp where sat Montana Mike in gloomy silence, awaiting the return of the old trapper.

Both men discovered each other at the same instant, and, springing together, a deadly struggle ensued.

A moment after the Sioux, who was fleet of foot, and had followed on after Long Bow, rushed upon the scene, and at once sprung to the rescue of the one whom a moment before he would have sprung upon in mortal fury, for he was also a lover of the Rose of the Rosebud, and was anxious to put so formidable a rival out of the way, besides being anxious to win favor in the maiden's eyes by punishing one who had insulted her.

But, though the Long Bow was his rival, and also a foe, the pale-face was doubly his enemy, and he determined to aid in his death first, and then settle accounts with his brother warrior.

How his plans were disarranged by the coming of Old Solitary the reader has seen.

Recovering his equilibrium, after having fallen flat on his back, Old Solitary gazed anxiously down over the precipice.

A fearful picture met his gaze; but he had expected something horrible as the sequel of the tumble over the cliff.

Twenty feet below there was a small projection on the side of the rocky wall—a knob of rock seemed partially split off from the main stratum, and in the crevice, thus formed, soil, sufficient to nourish a few small shrubs and a slender sapling, had accumulated.

To this sapling, bare of leaves, and apparently of little strength, Montana Mike hung with tenacious grasp—while below him, clutching vainly at the shrubbery in the wall's side, and which snapped or tore loose with his weight, the scout had a fleeting glance at Long Bow.

Still further down swept the other Sioux, until a dull thud proved that he was but a mangled mass of humanity.

"That ar' a skulp gone—an' thar ar' an-

other," said Old Solitary, as Long Bow slid on down the steep wall of rock and was lost in the gloom below.

The next second he expected to see Mike follow; a moment just then to him seemed as long as an hour, and his quickest movement seemed as slow as a funeral procession.

"Hold hard, pard! Don't move a muscle, or blink yer eyes. Ef yer does, durned ef yer mother 'll know yer in heving," he shouted, as he slung his lasso downward, and ran backward a dozen steps without waiting to see the result.

Taking a hasty turn around a tree, he proceeded to fasten the end.

Rapid as were his motions the strain upon the lasso came before he was ready for it—the rope tightened, the noose was drawn close around the tree—Montana Mike was evidently swinging clear at the other end.

How all was to end he knew not, but he worked with all his might, in tightening the knot, while the violent strain upon the lasso suddenly relaxed.

"Great grizzlies! is he let go?"

A wild war-whoop answered him, and turning quickly he found himself in the iron arms of the desperate Long Bow.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SERGEANT'S STORY.

"THANK God! Allen, you have returned. I feared for you greatly; but what news?"

The speaker was General Crook, seated in his tent, attired in an undress uniform, and surrounded by the small army he commanded, and which was pressing hard upon the war-path of the Sioux.

The person addressed was an elderly soldier, well formed, and with a fearless, determined face, that was now haggard and wan, while his clothes were torn, his uncovered feet bruised and bleeding.

Behind him stood two others, the one a soldier, also badly used up, and with an arm in a sling made of a piece of blanket—the other was a Crow Indian, with stern, impressible face, and if he felt fatigue he certainly kept it well hidden.

"And we liked never to have returned, general; we got into a tight place, sir," replied the old soldier, addressed by his commander as Allen.

"Take a drink, all of you, for you need it, from your looks, and then tell me of your trip," said the general, kindly, and having with alacrity obeyed, Sergeant Allen said, in a brisk voice.

"You see, sir, we followed your instructions to the letter, and pushed on until at night we got so near to the Sioux villages that we could hear them pow-wow like mad.

"The moon being bright as day, sir, we just sought a hiding-place for ourselves and horses, and while Foster and myself were sleeping, and the Crow Indian here a-watching, we were awakened by wild yelling over toward the Sioux village, and the next minute on the cliff above us appeared an Injun warrior, and, Lord love you, general, he was swinging around his head a young gal, we judged.

"Well, sir, seeing that he was going to throw her over the precipice, I up and fired, and so did the Crow. You see we never thought of two things in our hurry—that we might kill the gal, as well as the Injun, and, if we missed both, we would fetch the whole village down upon us."

"Yes, it was a most imprudent act; I thought you had more judgment, Allen."

"And so I have, sir, where a petticoat ain't concerned. With women I always was a fool, and I couldn't bear to see the young squaw toppled down three hundred feet."

"And your gallantry nearly cost you your lives; but, go on—you killed the warrior, or the girl, or both?"

"No, sir, we missed them both—missed everything but the cliff, and the next moment the Sioux gave the girl a sling clean off from

his hands; but there came the rub, because she didn't fall, but swung back and disappeared in the shadow of the trees."

"Perhaps her dress caught in the branches and saved her?"

"It might be, general; anyhow, the Sioux got scared and run off, and soon we heard a party hot on his trail, and we laid low, I tell you, sir."

"It was a strange adventure, Allen; but tell me, what more did you discover?"

"Not much, sir, except that we discovered that the Sioux had discovered us, and as we dug out down the gorge we heard a pistol-shot and several wild war-cries above us, and suddenly down the face of the cliff came a dead Indian, or if he wasn't dead then, he was when he struck bottom.

"Well, sir, we came to a sudden halt, I tell you, general, and glancing up we saw two men clinging to the side of the cliff; one a white man, the other a Sioux; for the moonlight fell brightly upon them, and they were holding on tooth and nail, but what so, the lord only knows."

"One was a white man, you say?"

"Yes, sir; but we had no time to tarry, for the Sioux were hot on our trail down the canon, and we let out as fast as we could go; and on coming out upon the prairie, we rode in close under the shadow of the mountain until we saw a horseman dash out, and believing him to be a Sioux, we struck off over the plain."

"But he wasn't a Sioux; no, sir, not he! for he opened on our pursuers as if he had a whole regiment of rifles, and I tell you the Sioux pulled up."

"Did you not turn back to his aid?"

"No, sir; you gave us no orders to aid anybody—only to find out where the Indians were encamped. I was afraid we would not get back to tell you what we had seen if we turned back to help the horseman."

The general smiled at the reply of the sergeant, and then said:

"You were certain he was a white man?"

"Yes, sir; we saw him fire from a small ravine, and the flash of his rifle lighted up his form; he rode a dark-bay horse, and was dressed in buckskin—"

"Fearless Frank! as I live! Sergeant, I hope to God he has met with no harm. I wish you had turned back to his aid, after he so bravely came to your succor."

"Had there been only a few Indians in chase, I would have, general; but there was fully a hundred of them; besides, if it was the scout you speak of, sir, he can look out for himself; at any rate, I am thankful to him, for he saved our lives, as the Indians did not pursue us, and here we are."

"When was this, sergeant?"

"A little before daylight, sir—and we pressed our horses hard until they failed us, and the last twenty miles came on foot."

"It was twenty hours ago then. We are nearer the Indian village than I believed. Now go and get some food and rest, and in the morning I will question you again. You and your comrade have done well, sergeant."

The sergeant and his comrade saluted politely, and with their Crow companion turned away to leave the tent.

As they passed out, a tall, commanding form strode into the presence of General Crook and his officers, and politely removed his broad-brimmed slouch hat, looped up upon one side with a pin representing a silver arrow.

"Thank God! Fearless Frank, you are the one of all men I most wished to see," and General Crook warmly grasped the hand of the tall, splendid-looking man before him.

"Yes, general, I have come," and the man threw himself into a camp chair, a tired look upon his face, which was pale and stern.

It was the scout who had rescued the woman from the grave, and the recognition of whom had so moved him.

The same man, who, single-handed, had thrown himself between the two soldiers, the

Crow scout, and the pursuing Sioux, and who, in some mysterious way, had escaped the deadly danger he had so fearlessly confronted.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEED OF HERCULES.

WHEN the scout, now known to the reader as Fearless Frank, threw himself into the ravine to protect the retreat of the two soldiers and Crow Indian, he did so with a perfect trust he held in the speed of his own steed, should he have to fly, and a confidence in himself that had often saved his life in most desperate straits.

A man whose last few years had been passed upon the Western plains and in the mountains, constantly on the move from place to place, with apparently no real object in view other than a love of adventure, he had won upon the border, as usual, a nickname, which his daring life had well earned.

Hence, when Fearless Frank, or Frank Singleton, as he called himself, rode into General Crook's camp, on Goose Creek, and volunteered his services as a guide and scout, his offer was readily accepted, for, from the commander down, all knew him by reputation as one of the most reckless riders, dead shots, and daring plainsmen in the West.

Finding him a man of superior education, courtly manners, in spite of his buckskin, and a determined fellow in the direst danger, General Crook attached him to him as a kind of scouting *aide-de-camp*, well knowing that he could be relied upon under all circumstances.

Of his past life the general knew nothing, nor could he find any one who did, and there was something in Frank Singleton's face which forbade idle questioning.

Acquainted thoroughly with the country into which they were marching, Fearless Frank had started forth, two days before the opening incidents of this story, to discover the exact whereabouts of the Indian village, for though others had gone on a like errand, no correct information could be gained.

The result of his scouting the reader already is acquainted with—as also that he had recklessly thrown himself into danger to protect others.

When his rifle flashed like lightning in the faces of the pursuing Sioux, he saw with satisfaction that they quickly drew rein, for horses and riders in advance went down with a rapidity exasperating to the red-skins who followed.

Quickly wheeling into a gulch on the side of the mountain, the warriors held a consultation as to what was to be done, and during their hesitancy the scout beheld with satisfaction the three horsemen he was aiding, disappear in the distance, still urging their horses hard.

The Sioux also saw their game escaping from their grasp, and having come to some decision, a body of them suddenly dashed from the gorge, as though to circle around in pursuit.

But the nature of the ground brought them for some distance under the fire of the deadly rifle, and as shot after shot flashed forth, the little band felt its deadly blows, halted, wavered and retreated back into the gorge for safety.

Then another short pause followed. They, evidently, from the rapid firing and many shots, believed that a score of men were concealed in the ravine, and it behooved them to be cautious.

Smiling grimly at his success, Fearless Frank quickly refilled his rifle with cartridges, and then set about planning to escape from the certainly unpleasant quarters in which he had placed himself.

Well knowing that the Indians were closely watching the ravine, and at the same time plotting to surprise and circumvent him, his fertile brain at once hit upon a plan.

Taking from his saddle a small rope, he cut a piece off, and hung it across the edge of the ravine.

Then lighting a match, he set fire to one end

of the bit of rope, and a light smoke curled slowly upward.

"They will see the smoke, and think it comes from a pipe—the rope will burn five minutes, or more, and in that time I will be far enough away to defy them."

He crouched low and led his horse along the ravine, back toward the gorge out of which he had ridden upon the plain.

Nearing the hill-side the ravine became more shallow, but the stunted trees along its edge concealed him, and he was soon once more in the valley.

Mounting quickly he rode along up the canyon for a short distance, and then turned into a dry water-course that led to the hills above.

As he reached the hilltop, the yells coming from the prairie told him that his escape was discovered; but it did not trouble him, for he knew that the Indians would take to the plains to discover his trail, not believing that he would come into their very midst.

Presently strange sounds broke the stillness—and those who caused them were not a hundred feet away.

Quickly the scout drew rein, and then his keen ears detected loud breathing, the tramping of heavy feet, and a smothered oath in English.

"Hah! there is a struggle of some kind going on there, and one is a white man—perhaps the one who served the Rose of the Rosebud."

So saying the scout sprang to the ground, left his steed to await his coming, and glided forward with a quick, light tread to the edge of the timber.

Upon the edge of a lofty cliff he beheld two men fighting with all the desperation of despair.

The one was a white man—the other a red-skin warrior of gigantic frame.

The next instant he was on the spot, and with herculean strength he tore the men apart, for the white man was down, the red-man's iron grasp on his throat. A moment more and the Sioux would have been the victor.

Surprised, panting, bleeding, maddened, the warrior turned upon his assailant.

But, giant though he was, he had met his match, and more, for the white man held him in a clutch that was like riven steel, and backed him steadily, step by step, toward the fatal brink.

Once before the Indian had gone over that precipice, and now his eyes started almost from their sockets, his breath came and went with a fierceness that threatened to rupture the blood-vessels of the lungs; his teeth gritted together until the blood oozed from his shut lips, and every muscle, every nerve in his body was strained to breaking.

But in vain his every effort; in vain the workings of his wiry, painted form; in vain his herculean strength: he was in the hands of his master, and nearer and nearer he was forced to the edge.

Then he seemed to feel that some desperate act must be done to save him, and releasing his hold upon the white man, he attempted to bound away.

Vain the effort! Once freed from his grasp, the scout, with a marvelous effort of strength and quickness, shot him forward with a force that sent him over the dizzy chasm.

One loud, long cry, half of despair, half of defiance, and Long Bow, the huge Sioux chief, went downward like a flash of lightning.

There was no clutching then at the rocky wall; the arms waved wildly in empty space, and the next moment a crashing thud told that he was but a crumbled mass of flesh, blood and bone—that the spirit of the red brave had gone to the happy hunting-grounds of his people.

CHAPTER XI.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

HAVING hurled the Sioux chief over the precipice, Fearless Frank turned to look after the white man, whom, by his arriving just in the nick of time, he had saved from death, for,

though a person of great endurance and strength, in the giant warrior Old Solitary had found more than a match.

The old trapper was seated upon the ground, lugubriously rubbing his throat, upon which the points of the Indian's fingers were plainly visible.

His eyes were turned upon the scout, and in a drawling kind of tone, usual to him, he said:

"I'm not dead yit, pard; but, it's ter yerself I owe it I ain't fodder for coyotes. Great grizzlies, but ter see yer heur is a blessin' for sore eyes."

"Ef it hadn't 'a' bin yerself, wusted though I was by the skrimmage, I'd 'a' fined hands with yer ag'in' that 'tarnal red-skin; but I knowed yer, and, Lord bless yer, when Fearless Frank puts hands on a enemy, it's time for other fellers to take thurn off—put it thar, pard," and rising from the ground, Old Solitary offered his hand to the scout, whom he had met several times before when going to the settlements to sell pelts, or buy ammunition.

"I am glad I was of service to you, trapper, but was not that the Long Bow of the Sioux I sent over the cliff?"

"Is war, or I'm a ole Har; but, pard, what ar' yer doin' heur, can I ax?"

"Scouting after red-skins. I suppose you do not know that the hatchet is unburied and the Sioux are on the war-path?"

"That ar' a fack. I'm a-doin' a leetle scoutin', biz myself, along with a pard who went over the cliff a while ago," and Old Solitary went on to relate the history of his giving up gold-hunting for the war-path, and the adventures that had befallen himself and Montana Mike.

"And you say he caught on the cliff as he went down?"

"Yas, he did, an' so did the Ingin! Lord! but it makes me laff when I think o' that red-skin a-comin' up an' a-tackin' me. I was scared a'most to death, you bet; but let in 'on him, with all ther grit I hed, an' yer bet thur tussle was long an' interestin'. It w'd hev bin more interestin' ter ther red-skin then ter me, ef yer hadn't comed along an' j'ined in ther fandango."

"Then your partner may not yet be dead. I will run down your lasso and have a look, while you shake yourself together again, for you had a hard struggle."

So saying, the scout threw the trapper's blanket over the edge of the cliff, to keep the lasso from wearing, and the next moment swung himself over the brink.

Resting a moment upon the obstruction to which Montana Mike had clung, he then continued on down until he again found a resting-place. It was there the Long Bow had caught, and from which place he had caught the end of the lasso let down by Old Solitary.

The scout saw that the wall was not so steep, and that he could climb down without the aid of the lasso, which only extended a few feet further.

Cautiously he picked his way from projection to projection, and soon after reached the bottom of the gorge.

A glance upward showed him the face of Old Solitary peering down into the gloom.

Then he set to work in search of Montana Mike, fearing that he would come upon his dead body.

His eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom, for the moonlight did not reach down in the gorge, he beheld a dark object lying prone upon the ground against the base of the cliff. It was the Sioux warrior who had joined his brother warrior in the attack upon the pale-face.

Further out lay another dark form, crushed out of all human shape—the Long Bow, who had met the fate he intended for the Rose of the Rosebud, Montana Mike and Old Solitary.

But he whom he sought was nowhere visible. Thinking that the fall might not have killed him, he looked into every ravine near, and called the name of Montana Mike softly, for he might be wounded and crawled to a place of concealment.

But no answer came, and Fearless Frank looked up to tell his comrade that his search was useless.

But the face of the trapper had been withdrawn from the brink of the precipice, and that moment a suppressed cry came to the ears of the scout.

From whence it came he could not tell; but believing it to be from the lips of Montana Mike, he again began a search, which, in the end, proved useless as had the other.

With reluctance he ascended the cliffside, reached the lasso, and in a few moments after stepped upon the summit.

There a startling scene met his gaze.

Back, just under the shadow of the trees, stood a dozen Sioux braves, and at their feet lay a dark form—that of Old Solitary.

Never caught off his guard, the scout had along his rifle to his back when he went down into the gorge, and with the rapidity of thought he brought it round, and, like incessant lightning, the flashes came, while the ringing report rattled in a thousand echoes down the gorge, resounding like a full regiment in action.

CHAPTER XII.

AGAIN ON THE TRAIL.

"WELL, Singleton, I am certainly glad to see you back unharmed, and, if I mistake not, the three men who just left us, owe their lives to you. Help yourself," and General Crook shoved the flask of brandy toward the scout, who helped himself moderately, and replied:

"If they are the three I saw leave the mountains and start across the prairie as though Satan had sent for them, I may say, without vanity, that I saved their scalps."

"Yes, they told me of a single horseman who rushed in between them and their pursuers, and I at once thought it must be you; but tell me, what have you discovered, Singleton, and how did you get out of the trap in which the Crow and soldiers left you?"

"To begin at the beginning, general, I will say that I scouted around until I discovered the whereabouts of the Sioux, whom I found encamped in two villages, the main one in the mountains above the Rosebud, and a smaller camp in a neck of timber on the river, and near the prairie."

"Then there are more of them than I believed. Both of the scouts, Guard and Baptiste, reported that Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and Black Moon are in command, and that they have fully three thousand warriors at their back."

"And more, too; they have enough to keep busy both your command and that of General Terry, and they intend to make a bold stand, sir; is not this the opinion of Baptiste and Guard?"

"It is; but we have force enough to defeat them, especially if General Terry and myself consolidate."

"Baptiste and Guard are now off on a scout—they left last night."

"And I will start again in the morning. A good night's rest will make a new man of me," and the scout went on to tell how he had escaped from the ravine to the mountains, and of his coming upon Old Solitary in his desperate struggle with Long Bow.

Of his own part in that affair he said no more than was necessary to explain, and then went on to relate how he descended into the gorge, and returned to the top of the cliff to find the trapper a prisoner or a dead man—which, he did not know, for a score of Sioux stood over him.

"In Heaven's name! how did you escape, hemmed in as you were?" asked the general, who, with his officers, was deeply interested.

"I opened pretty lively with my thirty-four shooter, charged through them, whistled to my horse, that I had left not far away, and while they were considering who had lost a scalp, I dashed down the hillside, and once on the prairie, pursuit was useless."

"But I gave Bay Prince a hard ride of it. I will take Whirlwind to-morrow, for I have a plan on hand to get a spy in the enemy's camp, general."

"Hal some renegade white man?"

"I cannot now say who, general; but I start for the Indian camp in the morning, and hope soon to bring you reliable news. Any orders, sir?"

"None, except to order you not to be reckless."

"I am not, sir, and when I rely upon my rifle and Whirlwind, I generally can see my way out of a scrape."

"God grant it always be so. You are a matchless fellow on these plains, Singleton; I do not wish to lose you."

"Thank you, general. Good-night!"

And the scout left the tent without in any way having referred to his finding the buried woman in the cottonwoods, and his having met with the Rose of the Rosebud and left in her care the poor wounded girl.

Throwing himself upon his blanket, he was soon fast asleep; but with the morning sun he awoke, partook of a substantial breakfast, filled his haversack and ammunition-pouch, mounted his matchless steed, Whirlwind, and disappeared in the direction of the Rosebud river, bound upon another mission of desperate danger.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HUNTED RENEGADE.

WHEN Hart Moline turned about so suddenly, and sped away across the prairie, he recognized in the youth on the brown Indian pony one whom he would rather have given his left arm than met—why, the sequel will show.

Seeing that the boy pressed him hard, he determined to endeavor to stop the chase by a shot at his pony. Why he did not aim at the life of his pursuer he could not tell, for he would gladly have seen him dead; but some indescribable feeling kept his rifle-muzzle down from the boy's heart.

A sure shot, he sent a ball into the heart of the brown mustang, and down went horse and rider.

For a moment he feared he had killed the boy; but, no; he was upon his feet, and away dashed Hart Moline, a grim smile upon his lips.

If the pursuing Indians killed the boy that was not his lookout. His hand had blood enough on it without staining it with that of Ned Wylde.

Urging on his splendid animal he soon placed all danger from pursuit out of the question, and then he went at a more leisurely gait.

At daybreak he halted in a timber *motte*, and, having lariatied his horse to feed on the rich grass, he quickly prepared a substantial breakfast for himself, out of the contents of his haversack.

Having broken his long fast, he threw himself down to sleep, after one glance around him for any danger that might be lurking near.

Shortly after noon he awoke, greatly refreshed by his long sleep, and making a hearty meal off of the remnant of his breakfast, he was soon in the saddle, pushing rapidly on once more.

Toward evening he came upon a scene of cultivation—a rude settlement far in that border land.

With a stern, pale face he rode on, and a look of surprise crept gradually over his features, as no living being was visible to his gaze.

Riding up to a rude log-cabin he called aloud:

"Holloa! are you all asleep?"

A step resounded within; the next moment the door opened cautiously, and, apparently satisfied that there was no danger, a man stepped over the threshold and confronted Hart Moline.

It was the same one who had borne the ghastly burden the night before—the tall, haggard-faced man who had imagined he could

hear the blood-drops fall upon the prairie as he rode along in the full light of the moon.

At the sight of each other both men shuddered—a ghastly scene was conjured up before their mind's eye.

"You here?"

"Yes, Hart Moline, I am here."

"And why? I thought you had gone to join Crook's army."

"And so I intended, and will yet go; but Dan and myself met a scout, and that meeting changed our plans for a while."

"Why should it?"

"Look around you, Hart Moline. When you left this place, not thirty-six hours ago, it was full of life—do you see other than you and me now?"

"No; where have they gone?" angrily demanded Moline.

"To the fort. An officer came here with a company of cavalry, and ordered the whole settlement to the fort. All left this morning; this is what the scout told us."

"What had this to do with you not joining Crook?"

"Much; I came here to meet you."

"Meet me? Are you not paid for your work of blood? Was not our agreement that you and Dan should join Crook as scouts, and not come to this settlement again? You have your money and now you break faith."

"Yes, we have our money—blood-money—and we have broken our faith."

"Curses rest on you for it! Where is Dan?" and an evil look glittered in the eyes of Hart Moline, while his hand seemed involuntarily to fall upon his pistol-butt.

"Hold on, Hart Moline! Don't aim your pistol at my life. Take your hand off, I say, and I will tell you why I came here," and the man spoke with unexpected firmness.

"Be quick about it, then," impatiently replied Moline, at the same time withdrawing his hand from his revolver.

"You asked for Dan! He has gone to get a little game for supper, for the settlers left nothing to eat here. He will soon return, and you will pass the night with us; then our lines in life will divide, I hope forever, for your face recalls that to me I would not remember."

"I came here, Hart Moline, to save your life."

"My life?"

"Yes. Miserable man that I am—outcast from all I once held dear, I have yet some gratitude in my heart."

"Once you saved my life—ay, stained your hand in the blood of two white men to save me, when I was sore pressed by them."

"I have not forgotten that night, you see, though I was mad with drink when it all occurred."

"Perhaps it had been better had I died then over a game of cards; but I will not repine, for life is dear to us all."

"What has all this to do with why you broke faith with me, Benton?"

"It shows that I am not ungrateful, Hart—for the scout whom we met from the fort says your crime was known—that one whom you trusted in this settlement had confessed the whole plot, and soldiers were at once put on your trail."

"What! do you tell the truth?"

"I do. Thanks to your well-arranged plan, neither Dan nor myself were known to be your tools, and we are safe."

"Curses and maledictions fall on him for betraying me," shrieked, rather than spoke, Hart Moline, while his face became livid with rage.

"Now you know why I came here—that when you returned here and found the settlement deserted, you would not go to the fort and be caught like a wolf in a trap."

Instantly the wild manner of Hart Moline changed, and holding out his hand he grasped that of the man whom he called Benton, while he said in an earnest tone:

"From my heart I thank you. Forgive my unjust suspicions; but you say soldiers are on my track!"

"Yes; the commandant has sent word along the lines to take you dead or alive, and he also dispatched a couple of bands to hunt you up."

Hart Moline stood in silence for a moment, and then said in deep, sullen tones:

"Yes, I will do it. Benton, old fellow, we part now forever."

"Where do you go, Hart?"

"I go to join Sitting Bull and his warriors. Am I not a hunted man?"

"Shall I pause now, after what has been done?"

"Yes, I am now a renegade to my race; but to you alone I confide the secret now. If I am taken, then all will know."

"Go join Crook, Benton, you and Dan, and when you strike the mountains I will be hard on your trail. Farewell, old fellow, farewell."

With a mocking laugh Hart Moline threw himself into his saddle, drove the spurs deep into the flanks of his horse, and dashed away with a wild yell upon his lips; it sounded like the despairing cry of a lost soul.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BOY BRAVE AT BAY.

WHEN Montana Mike found himself clinging to the small sapling, on the bare face of the cliff, and glanced below at certain death should he let go his hold, he really felt that his end had come, unless Old Solitary came quickly to his aid, for he had recognized the trapper as he rushed upon the scene, just as he and his assailants had gone over the precipice.

As he gazed downward he saw Long Bow clinging below him, and his eyes piercing the gloom down in the gorge, he beheld his huge antagonist also clinging with desperate energy to some frail barrier for life.

Above him suddenly peered the face of Old Solitary, and his words gave him cheer; but, as the trapper turned away to fasten his lasso to the tree, the little sapling gave way under the terrible strain upon it, the roots parted, and he slid down the rocky wall, clutching at the Sioux as he went by.

At the moment he gave himself up for lost, his hands grasped another bush; it checked his fall momentarily, and then again he went downward, but the force of his descent was broken, the rock slanted a little, and he came at last to where a crevice gave him full support.

Just then he glanced above him, and in the moonlight beheld the dark form of the Sioux climb over the edge of the precipice—saved by the means that had been intended for him.

"Lord have mercy upon Old Solitary, if yonder red devil catches him unawares," he exclaimed; but his anxiety for his comrade was quickly changed to a like feeling on his own account, for he beheld a body of horsemen dashing down the gorge.

Closely he hugged the cliff's base, and endeavored to make himself as small as possible.

Perhaps in the darkness and their haste they might pass him unnoticed.

On they came, like the wind, and the next moment swept by; they were Sioux warriors, and their keen eyes had failed to detect the presence of an enemy, almost under the very feet of their horses.

Anxious to get to the aid of Old Solitary as soon as possible, Mike sprung to his feet as soon as the Sioux had dashed by, and though bruised and bleeding from his slide down the cliff, felt that he could soon make the circuit of the abrupt wall of rocks.

Perhaps the clatter of the retreating hoofs drowned the noise of others; but certain it is three mounted warriors were suddenly and unexpectedly upon him.

With a bound he was away, and flashing into the midst of some stunted cedars he endeavored to elude the Sioux.

But they had already seen him, and urged their horses on in hot pursuit, and badly shaken up as he was by his struggle with Long Bow, and by his fall, they gained rapidly upon him.

Feeling that they would overtake him, Mon-

tana Mike sought the side of the hill, where he knew they could not follow him upon horseback.

But, the Indians kept him in sight, and ever and anon sent an arrow whizzing after him, one of which wounded him in the leg.

Tearing the barb from his flesh, the hunted man ran on, cursing the ill-luck that had deprived him of his rifle; but nearer and nearer drew his pursuers.

"Now I have them! Their horses cannot cross here," and he scrambled into a deep ravine, and then out on the other side, and ran down a ridge, that he saw sloped away toward the prairie.

But, determined to capture their game, the Sioux dismounted at the ravine and ran on in chase, with a speed scarcely less than their ponies had shown over the rough ground.

Reaching the prairie edge, Mike turned along in the shadow of the hills, and seeing that his pursuers were yet some distance behind, he seemed to gain renewed courage and ran on with increased speed.

But, the long run, of half an hour, began to tell upon him; his breath came quick and short; his tongue protruded from his mouth, and the arrow-wound in his leg bled freely and weakened him.

"It is no use trying; I am gone up; but I will fight it out at yonder rock."

So saying he rushed on, and the next moment turned around a huge boulder, to start back with a surprised, almost despairing cry.

Directly in his front, under the shadow of a cedar, was a human form; in the background was dimly seen a steed.

The next instant Montana Mike would have fired his pistol full in the face of the stranger, but a pleasant voice cried, quickly:

"Hold on, sir; I am no red-skin; but you are used up, and I'll fight this little battle for you."

Montana Mike could utter no word in reply; his half-raised arm fell to his side, and, panting like a hard-run hound, he sunk down beside the rock, his eyes upon the one whom he had so opportunely met.

Instantly the stranger sprung out to the edge of the boulder, his rifle was raised and pointed toward the coming Indians.

It was evident that he had not been taken unawares, and that he had watched the chase since Montana Mike had turned upon the prairie from the ridge.

As he stood there in the moonlight, the fearless, determined face of Ned Wylde was revealed.

A boy in years, he had done a man's work more than once, and now, at bay, once more he was ready to face death in any shape in which it might come.

CHAPTER XV.

A "PURTY GAL'S" RUSE.

WITH intense interest Old Solitary peered over the precipice, into the gorge below, fearing that he would hear the ill tidings that his partner was dead or cruelly wounded by his fall.

So intent was he in endeavoring to pierce the gloom below, that he failed to notice several dark forms creeping upon him.

In fact, they hovered over him, and yet he lay in silent search for the coming form of the scout.

"He's a-mashed into a jelly—you bet! an' I've got to go ther trail alone."

"Wall, I uset to be allers alone, an' that's why I got my name—durned ef I don't disremember my t'other name, it's bin so long sence it war handled. Wall, ef I ain't forgot then I'm a angil, an' I guesses as how no one would take this ole sarprint for a angil."

"Wall—I'm a-goin' to find the trail terrible lonesome like, kase I've bin uset to comp'ny o' late years—I don't luv Injun comp'ny tho', you bet, kase Injuns is slippery cusses, you bet, an' 'tain't no use o' havin' missionary men comin' among 'em to civilate 'em, an' tarn thar sperits toward hev'ing. Lor' bless me, they'd skulp

an ineniy, ef they tackled 'em in hev'ing."

"Injun is Injun, an' yer can't make nothin' else out'er 'em—great grizzlies! what in—"

It was all the old trapper had time to ejaculate, for he found himself in the grasp of a half dozen powerful Sioux, while a blanket was thrust over his head to smother his cries.

In two minutes' time he was securely bound, gagged, and laid back in the shadow of the trees, while the Sioux lay in wait for the coming of the scout.

"Didn't I tell yer so! Ain't Injuns Injuns, an' no mistake?"

"Heur I is, a pickled pale-face, sure and sar tin, you bet! Now, I'se the kind o' missionary man the gov'mint oughter send out among these hethen. Powder an' bullet will civilate them, not Bibles an' singin'-books."

"Wall, I guesses I'm in fer it, an' no mistake."

So saying, the old trapper set himself to work to watch the return of the scout, who he feared would be killed before his eyes.

He had not very long to wait before the tall form appeared above the cliff, and at once his keen eyes caught sight of the red-skins.

What followed confused Old Solitary as much as it did the Indians, for the scout seemed in a very blaze of lightning; the rattle of his rifle was incessant; his war-cries burst from his lips in defiant fury, and then he suddenly disappeared, leaving dead and dying Indians piled up under the trees.

An instant only the Indians were nonplused; and then they darted away in pursuit, leaving several of their number to look after the dead and wounded, and to take the prisoner to their village.

"Wall, ef that thar scout ain't ther devil in breeches, then I am a lyin' ole sinner."

"Durned ef he ain't a regiment by hisself, an' ef these cussed Injuns w'd take this cud out'er my meat-trap, I'd jist laff myself to death, you bet!"

"Oh, Lordy, Lordy, Lordy! how skeert them Injuns was—an' they hain't rekivered yit, kase they trembles as tho' they had the ague fits. Now, ef Montana Mike were to put in a appearance, they'd die o' grief, you bet, an' I'd be the only mourner."

Old Solitary's soliloquy was cut short by several warriors approaching and standing him upon his feet.

Then they unbound his ankles and motioned to him to follow.

He obeyed, following one warrior, while another came behind, bearing his arms and those of Montana Mike.

As though to prevent any attempt at escape, his own lasso had been taken from over the cliff and was tied around him, and each of his two guards held one end of it.

It was a long, fatiguing walk, and the daylight came, and the sun arose ere the village was reached.

Unmindful of the jeers cast upon him by squaws and children, as he entered the town, Old Solitary kept his eyes on the alert for any discovery he might be able to make, which would benefit the officers marching against the Indians.

Accustomed to live in deadly danger, he in no way considered his case hopeless, and a bright light flashed in his eyes as he beheld a form approaching.

It was the form of a maiden, of perhaps eighteen, with long, flowing, glossy hair, a superb physique, and a face more beautiful than any the trapper had before seen.

"That ar' the gal," was his mental ejaculation, and the next moment the Rose of the Rosebud confronted him.

"The Medicine Queen would see the pale-face. She would read in his eyes all that he has seen among those who march against her people; she would know if the tongue of the old pale-face is crooked," said the Rose, in an impressive voice, and none disputing her authority, she took the lasso and led the trapper away.

Several warriors would have followed, but she turned angrily on them.

"Is the Rose of the Rosebud a pappoose that she can not guard a bound pale-face?"

The rebuke was heeded, and she led the trapper across the village, while his keen eyes were counting the lodges for future use.

Down the steep pathway of the hill, upon which the village was located, she wound her way, until she came to the waterfall hitherto referred to.

Here the jeering crowd came to a halt, and the maiden led her prisoner on, until they entered the cave.

"Why did the pale-face come so near the village of the red-man?" she said, reproachfully, speaking in English.

"Ef I hadn't er comed heur, durned ef yer purty figger-head wouldn't 'a' bin smashed inter nuthin', gal."

"True; you saved the life of the Rose of the Rosebud. She never saw your face, but she knew you by this—it was the same that the pale-face threw around her," and the maiden pointed to the lasso, and then continued:

"Let the pale-face have no fear; the Rose will not let him die."

"I hev a pard about heur, ef he ain't de'd as salt mak' rel, that is of the same 'pinion as yer-self, purty gal; but, I'm thankful ter yer, durned ef I ain't."

"Now let the pale-face return with the Rose. The Medicine Queen is asleep; her eyes do not care to look upon the pale-face now."

"I guesses not; yer don't calkilate the ole ben shall see me, nuther—I see, purty gal, this ar' a put-up job. Pull them leadin' strings o' mine, an' I'll foller, you bet, an' won't kick in ther traces, nuther," and Old Solitary gave a sly wink, and after a short pause the Rose led him back the way they had come.

Taking him to the guard tepee, she left him there, saying to the warrior in charge:

"The Medicine Queen would see the pale-face when the moon is yonder; the sun dazzles her eyes."

Then, with a glance full of hope to the captive, she turned and walked away, leaving Old Solitary perfectly assured that the morrow's sun would see him a free man.

CHAPTER XVI.

MONTANA MIKE ASTONISHED.

ONE, two, three! and the three pursuers of Montana Mike bit the dust, brought down by the unerring fire of Ned Wylde.

"Now, sir, I think we had better leave here—I have a hiding-place above that a snake can not find," and the boy turned coolly to his companion, who with a great effort, got to his feet.

Leading the way up the steep ascent, the boy soon stopped by a large tree that grew to a great height and overhung a rocky cliff above.

"Now, this is not a very hard tree to climb, and it leads to a safe place. I would have been there now, only I didn't wish to leave my own good pony; but I come here in case I should get into trouble, for I was in these hills hunting a year ago, as guide to a party of gentlemen from the city, and I found out this retreat then."

"You are a brave boy. You have saved my life," at last Mike found breath enough to say.

"We won't talk of that, now. Are you able to climb this tree?"

"Yes; but have we left no trail?"

"None since we left the prairie. A hound couldn't track us here."

Into the branches the two then clambered from the rocks, and at a height of thirty feet from the foot of the giant monarch of the forest.

Slowly up the trunk they went, from limb to limb, until they came to where a huge branch overhung the rocky summit of a jutting peak of the mountain.

Out upon this they went, and let themselves down upon a kind of shelf, overhung by a sheer precipice behind them, protected by boulders upon each side, and open toward the prairie.

The only means of access was by way of the tree, and a safer, better place could not have been found.

"I followed a bear up here last year; and I got him, too; see, here is water, and these rocks form a kind of a cave," and Ned pointed to a trickling rivulet that fell over the precipice, and then threw his roll of blankets under the sheltering cliff.

"There, lie down and rest yourself, and you will soon be all right."

Montana Mike obeyed; the boy was master of the man then.

Explanations then followed between the two. Montana Mike's story was soon told; all that he cared to have the man know, the boy then made known. He had come into these parts in search of one whom he was determined to find.

That very night he had found him, and—had lost him.

But he would not despair; his life would be devoted to the duty, for duty it was to more than one.

Then the two went peacefully to sleep and the sun was far across the heavens when they awoke.

Well prepared with provisions, and with plenty of good water near, the two fared most comfortably, little troubled by the bands of prowling Indians they saw going hither and thither, or their wild war-cries when they discovered their three dead comrades, slain by Ned Wylde.

Thus another night and day passed, the Indians searching the gorges and hills for them, but without success, and both Montana Mike and Ned Wylde were perfectly satisfied that their retreat could not be discovered.

"To-morrow I will be able to travel—I will be myself again, thanks to you," said Mike as the two sat together in the moonlight, the third night of their stay on the rocky shelf.

"Well, we can then slip away from here and go and join Crook, who is marching toward the Rosebud. When he strikes these villages the war will end, and then I can continue my hunt without danger of being constantly hunted."

"You must be pretty determined to find your man, to risk your life up here."

"I am; but is not that an object moving yonder, far out on the prairie?"

Mike glanced in the direction indicated, and after a while answered: "Your eyes are better than mine, if you see anything."

"I see it now distinctly; it is either a horse or a buffalo coming this way; it is too large for a deer."

"Yes, I see it, now; it is a horse, and he has no rider. Now will be our chance if he comes this way."

The boy continued to watch the approaching object with the greatest interest.

"Nearer and nearer it came, until the moonlight plainly discovered it to be a horse walking slowly toward the hills."

"There is no man upon him. I'll go down and catch him, if I can—ha! see over his back! a man walking behind him; I saw him raise his head."

"You are right, boy; he is approaching these hills cautiously, and for fear of a shot, is keeping behind his steed."

With increased interest the two men gazed upon the approaching animal, which soon was almost at the base of the hills.

Here the horse halted, and above his back was visible a head, surmounted by a broad sombrero.

"It is a white man, that's certain," said Mike, and as he spoke, apparently satisfied with his observation, the man came round to the side of the steed and sprung into his saddle.

"Hulloa! what! why, what the deuce ails the boy?" exclaimed Montana Mike, as Ned Wylde suddenly sprang to his feet, threw his rifle-strap over his back, and the next moment was rapidly descending the tree.

To the call of Mike the boy made no answer—perhaps he did not hear.

Then he disappeared, and a few moments of suspense followed, when a dark form dashed

out into the moonlight from the base of the hills.

Still, like a statue, sat the horseman in his saddle, his eyes turned searchingly upon the tree-bordered hill.

Suddenly his gaze caught the form bounding from the shadow, and like thought he wheeled to dash away.

"Hart Moline! Hart Moline! for God's sake, hold!" came the ringing tones of the boy; but, unheeding, the man sped on; the rifle leaped to the shoulder of Ned Wylde, and a sharp report followed.

High in air bounded the splendid steed ridden by the man, but he did not go down, and if hit hard, still had struggled to continue his flight.

As if determined to kill, the boy sent shot after shot in pursuit of the flying horseman, who, apparently unhurt, still pressed on.

Then, in seeming despair, the brave boy broke down, and leaning his head upon his rifle, he burst into a flood of tears, his bitter sobs heard distinctly by Montana Mike upon the cliff.

A clatter of hoofs suddenly aroused the boy.

They were near at hand; and once more himself, he wheeled quickly to meet an expected foe.

But no; the moonlight shone upon a superb white steed and a splendid-looking rider.

It was Fearless Frank, the scout who had suddenly appeared upon the scene, coming from around the base of the hill, and sweeping on like the wind.

Seemingly unmindful of the presence of the boy, he spurred on hot on the trail of Hart Moline, and as fast as he could run, Ned Wylde rushed on in chase, and five minutes after the three were lost to the gaze of Montana Mike, who, with surprise, had watched the strange scene occurring upon the prairie.

CHAPTER XVII.

TRAILING A RENEGADE.

WHEN Fearless Frank left the camp of General Crook, he felt that he had a dangerous duty before him, for he was determined to again hold converse with the Rose of the Rosebud, and none knew the danger attending such a determination better than himself.

Having been turned aside from his former scout to the prairie encampment of Sitting Bull, by the discovery of the buried woman in the thicket, he shaped his course again in that direction, and approached it with the greatest caution, in the early evening ere the moon had arisen.

Halting for a rest for his steed, after crossing the river, he sought a place of concealment for Whirlwind, and then cautiously crept in the direction of the Indian village.

At length he left the shelter of the river bank, and was creeping through an open place of timber, when the noise of hoofs caused him to quickly draw himself up into the branches of a tree near at hand.

A moment after a score of warriors came along, and halted beneath the shadow of the very tree that concealed the scout.

Why they had stopped there, the scout could not tell, and for a moment believed that their quick eyes had fallen upon his trail.

"No; they were not looking, but listening."

Then the ears of the scout caught the clatter of hoofs; a horse was approaching over the prairie, and coming at a rapid gallop.

This sound was what had caused the Indians to halt.

Each warrior then, at a motion of one who seemed to be the chief, took shelter behind the trunk of some convenient tree, and he who had seemed the leader remained beneath the large willow that concealed the scout.

Bravely through an opening in the branches the moonlight fell upon the warrior, and every nerve in the frame of the scout trembled as he beheld, almost in reach of his hand, the dark, stern, daring face and athletic form of Sitting

Bull, who little dreamed that a deadly enemy was near, contemplating the chances of escape should he kill him where he sat upon his pretty, spotted pony.

Nearer and nearer came the hoof-strokes, and then their rapid beat changed to a slower gait as the timber was reached.

A moment after the dark form of a horse and rider came in sight.

"My God! it is a white man! In Heaven's name, how can I warn him of danger," muttered Fearless Frank, as he brought his rifle found for ready use.

Suddenly the horseman drew rein; his searching eyes had detected the half-concealed forms of the warriors behind the tree-trunks.

"Let not my red brothers dread evil. I am the friend of their people," cried the horseman, in the Sioux tongue.

"The pale-face is no friend to the red-man; his people are now on the trail of my warriors," replied the deep, stern voice of Sitting Bull, who yet kept his position behind the tree.

"The pale-faces have driven me from their villages; they hunt me, as does the red-man the buffalo, and I am come to live in the tepees of my Sioux brothers.

"I would show them how to strike to the heart of the pale-face, and load their belts with scalps; will my red brothers trust me now!

"I am no coyote in their village."

"The pale-face has spoken well, if his tongue is not crooked; let him come here and look in the eyes of Sitting Bull."

"Sitting Bull! It is you whom I seek, chief. I have news for you—news that will make your red heart glad, and redden your hands still more with the crimson blood of the pale-faces," said the horseman, in a voice of savage joy, as he rode forward and confronted Sitting Bull.

"My white brother speaks well. I have seen him in the towns of his people; I have seen him among the tepees of my tribe, when the hatchet was buried.

"He has a keen eye, and his hand is red with the blood of his own people; he is welcome," and Sitting Bull held forth his hand, which the horseman firmly grasped.

"God in heaven! it is Hart Moline," and the scout buried his head upon his hands.

And thus he remained, seemingly unmindful of all that the white man told the red, and which made him a traitor to his own people.

"The pale-face is the brother of Sitting Bull; he shall be a great chief.

"Let him now go to the village of the Crazy Horse. It is beyond the prairie in the mountains. Let him tell the Crazy Horse all that his tongue has said to the Sitting Bull, and the Medicine Queen of the Sioux will make him a warrior of my people. The Sitting Bull has spoken."

"I will do as the Sitting Bull directs. The daughter of the Medicine Queen, the Rose of the Rosebud, is known to me. Only three suns ago, I would have met the Rose to give to her one whose eyes were as bright as her own—one whom I intended should become the squaw of some Sioux brave; but the Rose was not there to meet me."

"The Rose of the Rosebud clings close to the Medicine Queen; my pale-face brother will see her in the village on the mountains."

"My red brother has spoken well," replied Hart Moline, and a moment after he was riding in the direction of the mountains, while Sitting Bull and his warriors continued on in the direction they had been going when the clatter of hoofs had brought them to a halt.

The scout awaited until the coast was clear, and then hastily descending from his place of concealment, he walked rapidly back to the spot where he had left his steed, mounted quickly, and, having struck the trail of Hart Moline, started off in rapid pursuit.

With a swinging pace Whirlwind pressed on, until he came in sight of the horse and rider in the front, just as Ned Wylde opened upon him with his rifle without apparent effect.

Determined to overtake the renegade, Fearless Frank pushed on in chase, almost unmindful of the presence of the boy; his game was before him, and he would run it to the death.

CHAPTER XVIII

NED WYLDE'S DISCOVERY.

On, on, like the wind swept the steed of Hart Moline, and behind him came his determined pursuer, his matchless steed gaining on the one in his front at every bound.

Behind them, on foot, ran Ned Wylde, exerting every energy to prevent being left out of sight.

For some distance the mad race continued, and then Hart Moline looked back with a triumphant glance. A heavily-wooded gorge was just in front of him.

But, as he triumphed, there came a flash, a whirring sound, and a stinging sensation under his right shoulder-blade.

"Good God! I am hard hit," he cried, as he reeled in the saddle, and with terrible energy, he spurred forward and disappeared in the gloom of the gorge.

A few moments passed, and Whirlwind bore his master into the canyon with the speed of an arrow.

Up the gulch he rode like the wind, and then suddenly drew rein; before him was the object of his search.

Hart Moline lay at the base of the hill, plainly visible in the moonlight, and from his clenched teeth oozed both blood and foam.

Over him bent a slender, graceful form—that of the Rose of the Rosebud.

A few paces distant Swift, unmindful of his master's suffering, and a slight wound in his leg, from which the blood trickled slowly, was feeding upon the luxurious grass.

As the scout rode up, the Rose of the Rosebud turned toward him, and said, softly:

"The pale-face is welcome—his brother is sorely wounded."

"He is no brother; he is a traitor to his people; his heart was black, and my rifle sought his life; but he is not yet dead, and there is danger here. Will the Rose let me bear the pale-face into her cave?"

"Come," was the simple response, and raising Hart Moline in his strong arms, the scout bore him in behind the waterfall and laid him upon a buffalo-robe near the tepee of the Medicine Queen.

Then he returned and quickly led in his own steed and that of the renegade, the Rose guiding him through the cavern.

As he disappeared behind the waterfall, a dark form appeared upon the outer scene.

It was Ned Wylde, breathless and eager.

At first he seemed as though about to dash on into the cavern behind the cataract, but, as though suddenly changing his mind, he crept into the shadow of a clump of cedars and sat down to rest.

A few moments sufficed to get back his breath, after his hard run, and then he began to reconnoiter.

Having marked the spot where he had seen the scout and the horses disappear, he glided into the mass of falling spray and found himself beneath a heavy shelf of the cliff, while before him yawned a huge cavern.

"I guess this will keep—I'll go back and get Montana Mike, and together we'll solve this mystery."

"Anyhow, I have found out one thing: this is the secret retreat of Hart Moline, and I believe he is in league with the red-skins."

So saying, the boy retraced his way, and gliding down the gorge, he suddenly stopped, with an expression of delight upon his face.

"Who can this belong to? Hart Moline's, as I live," and he turned the rifle he had found over and over again, examining it closely.

"Yes, here is his name; I remember the rifle well; but how did he come to drop it!

"Well, I'll solve all this when I get back. In the mean time it will serve Mike a good turn."

Retracing his steps as he had come, in half an hour he was in front of the hillside, and a low whistle received an answer from above on the rocks.

"Come down and bring the traps with you. I have business for both of us," called the boy, and in ten minutes more Montana Mike stood by his side.

"First, here is a gun I will lend you. It is loaded, and will shoot sixteen times."

"And the owner—you killed him?"

"No, he escaped me; but I made a discovery, and returned for you."

"I am ready; what did you discover?"

"A cave, where, if I am not mistaken, I will find the one I have long sought—hal! yonder is a horseman," and with the word, both the boy and the man sprung in close to the rocks, where they were out of the moonlight.

The person discerned was mounted on an Indian pony, and was coming directly toward them.

As he drew nearer, Montana Mike could scarcely suppress a yell of delight, for he recognized the well-known form of Old Solitary.

Presently the horseman drew within a few paces of them, and Mike called out:

"Injuns!"

Instantly, Old Solitary threw himself on the other side of his horse, and brought his rifle to bear in the direction of the voice.

The next moment he called out:

"That's a durned lie. No Injun is fool enough to advertise himself that a way, an' lookee heur, Montana Mike, you is jist the rooster I is a-lookin' for."

"And I am glad you have found me, Solitary, for of all men I wanted to see you are the one. I didn't scare you much, then?" and Mike wrung his friend's hands.

"Yes, I'm allers skeert in these parts, an' I'm jist gittin' better, thank ye, from a skeer I hev bin had on me since thar night you went over the cliff so slick. How is yer, pard?"

"Safe and sound now, Sol; but I owe my life to this young fellow, who is good grit as any man I ever met."

"He looks like a bantam as had spurs an' c'd crowd. Glad ter make yer 'quaintance, small feller! How's all ter hum with yer?" and Old Solitary held forth his hand.

"I have no home now, sir," sadly said Ned, while a tear glittered in the moonlight, as it rolled down his cheek.

"Poor young feller! Well, I ain't got no home neither, other then heurabouts; but I see'd you afore, youngster."

"When, sir?"

"This blessed night. Yer see, I've bin prisoner ter the reds, until a purty gal tuk a shine ter my old carcass, and let me out inter ther woods, an' gi'n me my shootin'-irons and a pony ter boot. Wall, she'd jist tarded me out to graze on my own hook, when a feller came a-tearin' up the gorge like mad, an' I made tracks fer ther bushes on ther hillside."

"Wall, a minnit arter, along comed another fellow, one who is just the boss in these parts, an' he disappeared 'round ther bend in ther gorge; then I see'd yourself a-comin' on ther trail, an' shortly arter yer tuk the back track, an' I 'cluded yer'd foun' suthin' yer didn't relish up thar, so I dug out myself, as this ain't bin a healthy kentry for me, you bet."

In a few words Ned Wylde explained that the leading horseman was one he was in search of, and told of his discovery of the cave, and that he saw the second horseman go in there with the two steeds.

"Now I know ther place, purty well, an' ef yer say the word, fellers, we'll go an' snoot out what ar' goin' on thar, kase that place ar' the home o' the Medicine Queen o' the Sioux; so here goes."

As Montana Mike was still a little stiff from his fall, Old Solitary let him mount his pony, and the three set out together to solve the mystery of the secret cavern—the home of the Medicine Queen of the Sioux.

CHAPTER XIX

A STRANGE MEETING.

When Fearless Frank entered the cavern with the horses, he quickly secured them, and then sought the spot where lay Hart Moline, the Rose of the Rosebud supporting his head.

Presently the burning eyes of the wounded man opened, and their gaze rested upon the handsome face of the scout.

"Frank Singleton! great God! what a retribution," he gnashed, rather than said, through his shut teeth.

"Yes, Hart Moline; it is Frank Singleton, and you have fallen by my hand; but not for the past did I slay you. No, though I hated you for that, I would not do that. I slew you because you are a renegade to your race."

"Ha! who says this?"

"I do. This very night I heard your plans with Sitting Bull, and I tracked you here to punish you as you deserved."

"Will I die, Singleton? Say, is there no chance that I may live, for I would not die here like a dog?" cried the wretched man, eagerly.

"None! the bullet passed clear through your body. You are doomed, and it is better so; another week and your guilty soul would have more to answer for," sternly said the scout.

"It has enough, God knows; but, tell me again, Singleton, is there not a shadow of hope for me? I do not wish to die, and beg you, for God's sake, save me! Save my life now, Singleton, and my blood will not be on your hands, on your soul. Remember, Frank, we were boys together, and then you loved me; I know you did, and dearly did I love you, so do not let your hand take my life."

At the wild entreaty of the man Frank Singleton shuddered, and his face became livid in the moonlight.

But he answered sadly:

"It is too late now, Hart; the blow is given, and you cannot live; if I could, willingly now would I save you."

"Oh, God! oh, God! if there be a God, let Him have mercy now on me."

"Frank, you do not know all that I have done; you do not know of my crime-stained, wicked life, and how I have wronged you. Listen, Frank, and I will tell you all, even though you curse me for it."

"Frank, Marion never loved me. She loved you, and that turned my heart against you."

"Ay, when you went into the army, and were ordered off on the border, I determined to break off the engagement between you and Marian."

"It was hard to make her doubt you; hard, indeed; but at last she severed the engagement between you, and after a year I won her promise to become my wife."

"She told me frankly that she did not, and never could love me as she did you; but I told her that I would be content, and, urged by her father, she became my wife."

"Well, I was always a wild, reckless fellow, as you know, Frank, and quickly gambled away my property; but, ere I became a beggar, Marian left me, and came West with her father, who, having lost his means in speculation, determined to establish himself out here as a farmer."

"Shortly after their departure I got into a gambling difficulty, and in a fit of madness shot dead one of my comrades."

"Strange to say, I came West, found out Marian and her father, and was forgiven the past; but they knew not of my other and worse crime."

"By accident I got from the mail one day a bundle of papers for Marian's father; I opened the envelope, and found that my wife and her brother had inherited a large fortune, to be held in keeping by the father, or a guardian chosen by him, until my wife's brother should be of age."

"The devil tempted me then, and I began a worse career of crime, for I kept the legacy a secret, and—and—but I will confess it: I way-

laid my father-in-law one night, as he was coming home, and shot him down."

"You did this crime, Hart Moline?"

"Wait and hear all, Frank—hear what a precious pet of Satan I have been."

"Yes, I shot him, and none suspected me."

"Then I began to gamble again, and all the frontier towns knew me as a desperate man."

"At length, I drove my wife's brother from his home, and yet through all she clung to me, though I made her life a misery, her home a very perdition."

"Determined at last to go East and attempt to claim my wife's property, I left her at Fort R—, under the care of the commandant and his wife, and started for New York."

"There I found that the property was in the hands of a lawyer, who was as corrupt as myself, for he told me that if my wife were dead he would turn her share over to me—for a consideration."

"I at once returned West, sought the fort, and was as good as man could be to his wife, and she seemed almost happy; but what is the matter, Frank?"

"Nothing! go on; I hear every word."

"The Rose of the Rosebud also has ears. The pale-face is a bad man; he has a black heart," said the maiden, firmly.

"There was one in the fort, a woman, for whom I held a guilty love, and to her I told my plan. It was to ride out on horseback with Marian, and return in several days, saying that Indians had captured us, and that I had escaped."

"At a convenient distance I had two companions awaiting me—desperate characters, both of them."

"One of them I knew; the other I had never seen; he was engaged by the tool I hired."

"Not to be recognized by him, I wore a heavy false beard, and when I put it on the act greatly frightened Marian, and she wished to go back to the fort."

"Soon after we met the two men at the appointed place, and we started for the Sioux country, it being my intention to bring Marian hither, and give her to the Sioux."

"Great God!"

"Well you may exclaim at my wickedness, Singleton."

"In spite of her entreaties and tears, I came on with her until several nights ago, when, near the camps of the Sioux, we espied a scouting party of cavalry, and with a wild shriek Marian called to them."

"They heard and came toward us—discovery would bring death to us, and I reluctantly gave the order to my men to stop her mouth."

"They took me at my word—one of them dealing her a severe blow on the head, the other drawing his knife across her throat—oh, God! shut out the memory of that moment from me," and the miserable wretch hid his face in his hands.

But the scout stood cold, stern and silent—his arms folded upon his breast.

"We could not leave her there to be discovered, and one of the men took her across his saddle, and we sped away."

"Eluding the cavalry, I led the way to a spot I knew well—I had often camped there when hunting—and there we buried her, and—Oh, holy God! the grave has yielded up its dead!"

"With eyes starting from their sockets, with scared, wild face, the man shrunk back, his arms stretched out as though to ward off some horrid specter."

Before him, like an avenging angel, with pale and haggard face, stood Marian—she whom he believed in her grave!

One wild, loud, piercing shriek, and Hart Moline's life had ended.

CHAPTER XX

AFTER MANY YEARS.

THOUGH the eyes stared wildly, and the lips were parted, as though about to speak, Hart

Moline was dead; his evil spirit had forever left its tenement of clay, his wicked heart had ceased its pulsations, never to throb again.

From the dead man before her, from him who had been her husband, the poor woman, sinned against so cruelly, turned her large, luminous eyes upon Frank Singleton, who still stood, with arms folded across his broad breast, gazing stern and silent upon the scene.

Weirdly beautiful she looked there in the moonlight, her face pale as death, and her riding-habit clinging close around her faultless form—more like a marble statue than a being of flesh and blood she seemed.

"Frank Singleton, thus we meet again, after six long years of separation."

"I believed you false—you believed me false—his story, his tongue now palsied by death, has told how cruelly deceived we both were, for I have heard his whole story of crime."

"My ears have drank in all. God knows I knew that he was wicked, I felt that he was evil at heart, yet I never believed him such as he has this night confessed himself. It is hard for me to abhor the memory of him that was my husband; but so it must be."

"It is to you, then, that I owe my life—my release from an awful death, so my kind nurse here has told me; there is more to tell, more that you can tell, and will tell me one of these days."

"But I am weak now. Though they struck at my life and failed, yet they have given me much pain, and I need rest."

"To you, Frank, I leave it, that I see not his body again, for even in death it is terrible."

The woman turned slowly to move away, not even casting one glance upon the dead.

"Sister!"

All started at the sound, and the woman turned back with a nervous shudder.

"Sister Marian—I am here," came the voice from the shadow of the cavern.

"Oh, God, Thou art good! It is my brother's voice! He has come to me," cried the woman.

The next instant a slender form bounded into the bright moonlight from the darkness of the cave.

It was Ned Wylde, and with a glad cry he threw his arms around his sister. Those whom he sought he had found—the one he had tracked for love, the other he had trailed for revenge.

Then from out the shadow came two other forms—Old Solitary and Montana Mike—for, with the boy, they had been quiet observers of all that had transpired, having entered the cavern, but refrained from breaking in upon the death-scene.

For a moment the brother and sister remained enfolded in a warm embrace, and then Frank Singleton said, kindly:

"Have you no word for me, Ned?"

"Indeed I have, Mr. Singleton. I have not forgotten you, young as I was when we last met, and now to you I owe more than to any one else living."

"Of that we will not speak, Ned; but your sister is weak, and she has had a terrible trial to-night—let the Rose of the Rosebud lead her into the tepee—and see, we must be off, for, ere long, daybreak will be upon us, and five thousand Sioux warriors are within call of us. Will the Rose still care for the pale-face lady until she is strong enough to leave the village of the Sioux?"

"The Rose loves the lily of the pale-faces; she will be a sister to her," answered the maiden, twining her arm around the slender waist of Marian.

Suddenly a tall form bounded forward and confronted the Rose of the Rosebud.

It was Montana Mike, and he gazed into the face of the maiden with a startled, searching look.

"Girl, who are you?" he asked, in a voice that shook with emotion.

"I am the Rose of the Rosebud—the daughter of the Sioux nation," she answered, proudly.

"No, no, no—who are you, girl? I say who are you?"

"The Rose of the Rosebud has spoken."

"No, you have not told me—speak! does the red blood of the Indian flow in your veins?"

"The Rose sprung up in a different soil from that which nurtures the red children of the plains. Once she was a pale-face, many moons ago, but those who loved her are gone," and the maiden spoke sadly.

"Oh, no, girl! Here is one who loves you. *Rose Massey, you are my child!*

"Ten long years ago the Sioux robbed me of home, wife and child."

"My wife's dead body I saw and buried—the body of my daughter I never found."

"You are that child—speak, and tell me that you remember me, that you know your father, and God will bless you."

In earnest pleading the man stood before her, and as the bright moonlight fell full upon his face the maiden gazed thereon with a puzzled look, while all around awaited in silence her answer.

Gradually her face changed, the muscles quivered, the eyes drooped, and then were raised, and the bosom heaved convulsively—memory was trooping up from the long-buried past.

Again the eyes fell, the fingers were clasped together and worked nervously, and then her gaze rested once more upon the face of the man.

"Speak to her as was your wont in her childhood—call her by some pet name you had for her," whispered the scout, and his voice sounded hollow and strange; it seemed almost to break the spell of a scene that was holy.

"My Rose of the wildwood—come to your papa," said Montana Mike, trembling like a reed shaken by the wind, and his voice quivering with emotion.

The eyes met his own, then, the arms were outstretched, and with a glad, thrilling cry, the maiden sprung forward, saying:

"Papa, oh, my papa, I know you now—you have come for your little Rose."

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN the gray dawn of approaching day began to brighten in the eastern skies, four horsemen rode slowly from the cavern behind the cataract, and set off at a rapid pace over the prairie.

These four were Frank Singleton, Mike Massey, Fred Wylde and Old Solitary, who, having forgotten his own Christian name himself, it is no wonder that I cannot recall it.

Without sparing spur they pressed on rapidly, until at length they arrived in Crook's camp.

Steadily advancing, though slowly, into the Indian country, General Crook greeted the return of Fearless Frank and his companions with delight, and the news brought him by the scout told him that a fight was near at hand—that soon he must meet the famous Sitting Bull and his thousands of braves.

Sooner than he had expected the battle came—the Battle of the Rosebud, the result of which is already known to those who have thus far read my romance of the recent war with the cruel Sioux.

Though the Indians temporarily checked the advance of General Crook, by their splendid fighting, and the superb generalship of their chiefs, they were also glad to retreat, and at once deserted their camps on the Rosebud, pushing further into the mountains.

Following closely upon the retreating Sioux, were four daring scouts, who had distinguished themselves in the Battle of the Rosebud, and need not be again presented to the reader.

As the last warrior filed over the hills, where had stood his mountain village, Fearless Frank and his three companions dashed through the spray of the cascade, and found themselves in the open glen.

The tepee of the Medicine Queen was gone, and the spot looked deserted, but from the cedars on the hillside glided two slender forms—Marian and Rose.

Warmly they greeted their friends, and ten minutes after they were mounted upon ponies which the Rose of the Rosebud, never suspected of being a traitress to the Sioux, had concealed in the glen.

Greatly improved by her rest, and the kind nursing of her fair companion, and with her wounds nearly healed, Marian expressed herself as able to undertake a long journey, and

the party at once set out for the camp of General Crook.

From there they went back to the settlements, where Mike Massey, long known as Montana Mike, intended securing a comfortable home for his newly-found daughter, while he rejoined General Crook as a scout.

But to this, Marian and Ned Wylde would not listen; they insisted that the lovely girl should accompany them to New York, where it was their intention to at once take possession of the property to which they had fallen heir.

With sad farewells the party at last separated, Ned Wylde, his lovely sister, and the Rose of the Rosebud taking the cars for New York, and Frank Singleton, Mike Massey and Old Solitary mounting their horses and setting out once more to meet the dangers of the war-path against the cruel Sioux.

Perhaps, one of these days, Frank Singleton and Marian May become man and wife, and Ned Wylde, the gallant boy scout, may lead to the altar the beautiful Rose of the Rosebud—it may be, and it may not, who can tell?

Yet, certain I am, that Old Solitary will never marry as long as he can find a Sioux to go for with Rifle and Tomahawk.

THE END.

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